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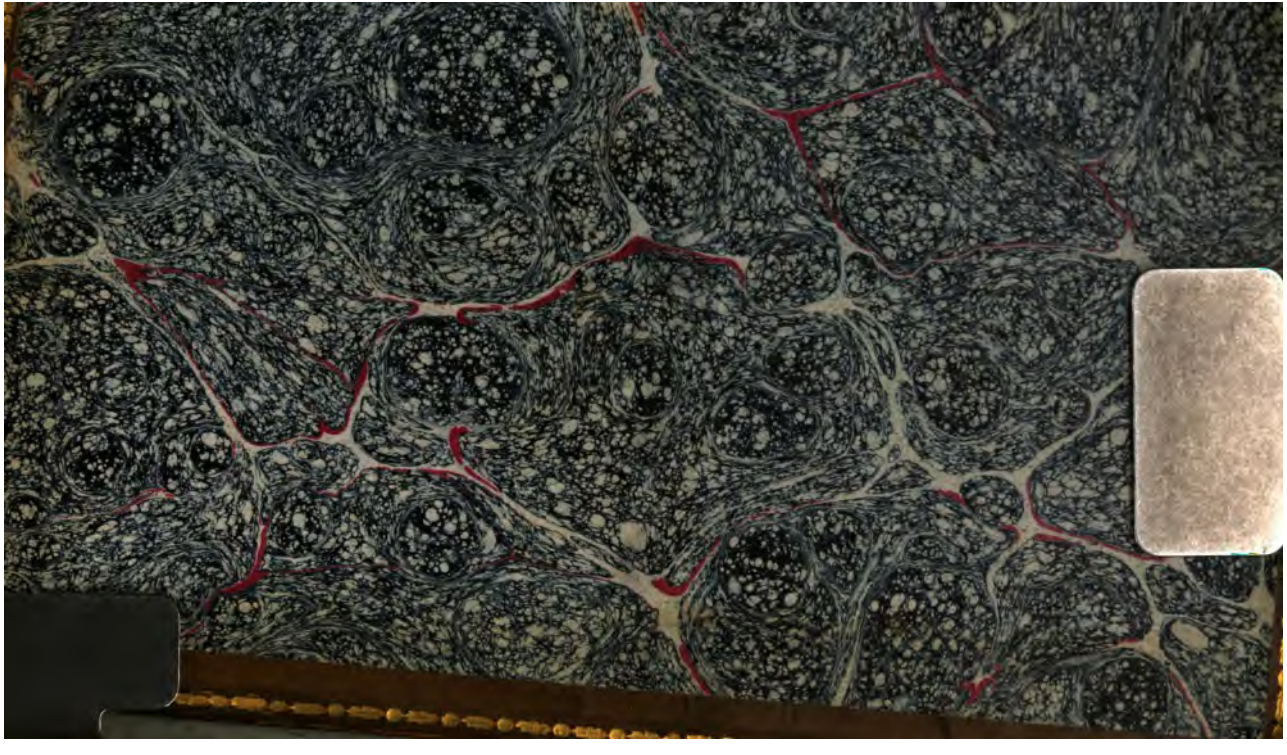

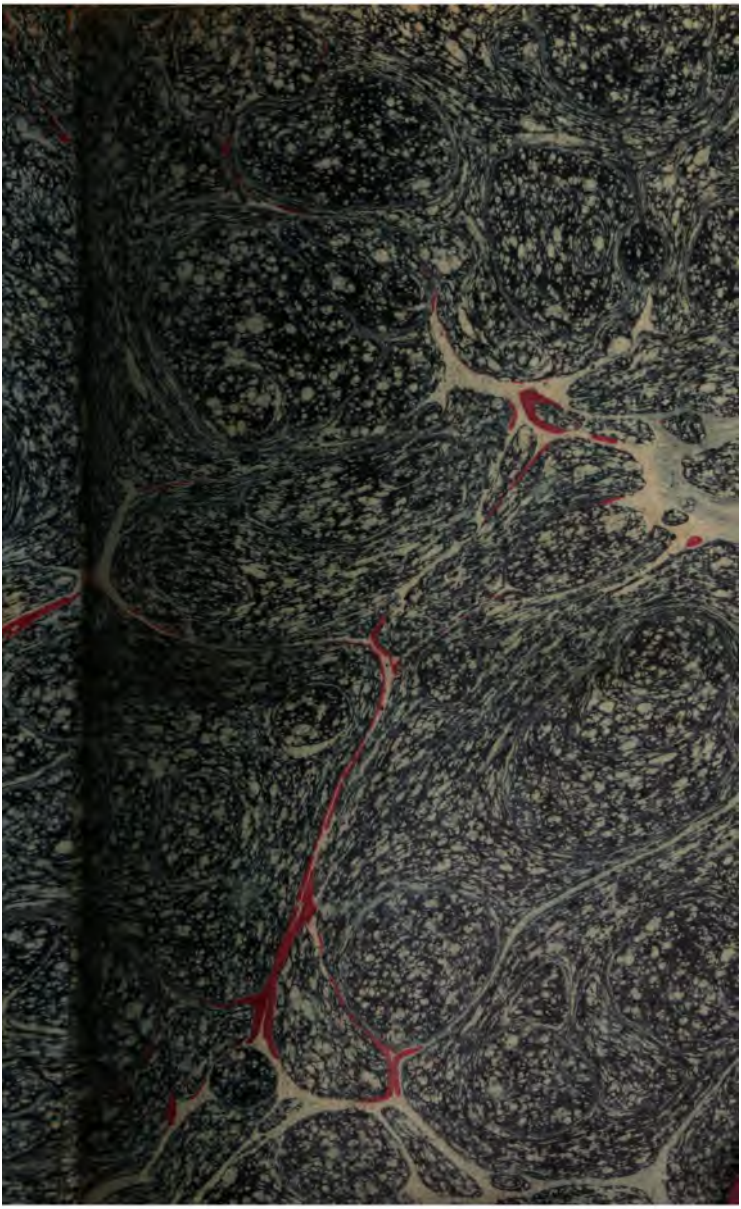

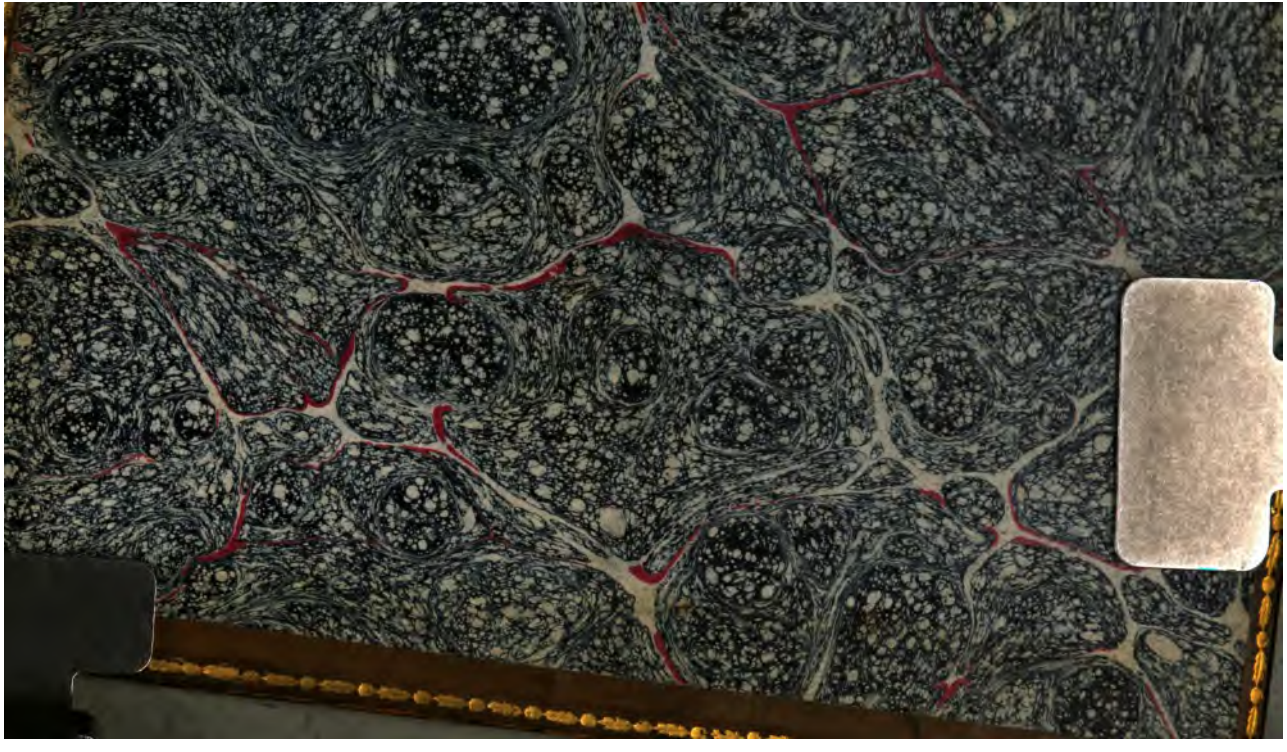

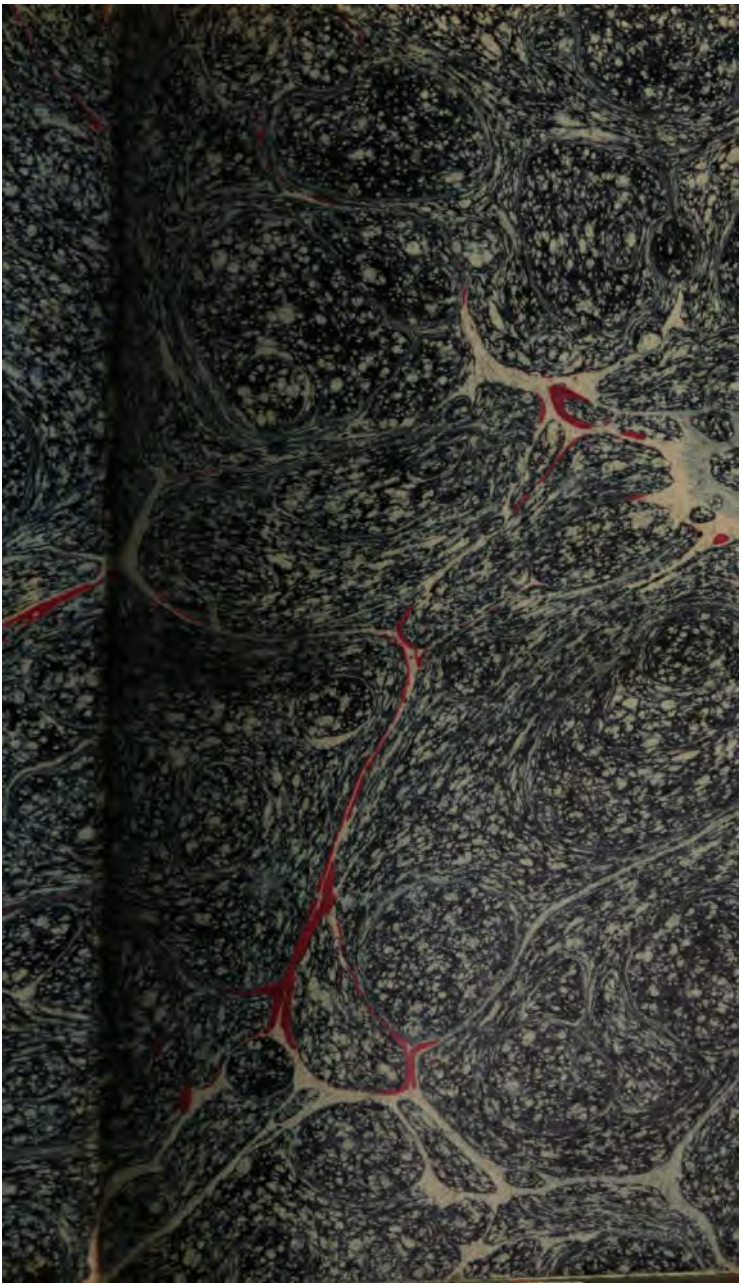

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THE

SOLDIER'S ORPHAN:

A TALE.

VOL. II.

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SOLDIER'S ORPHAN:

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BY MRS. COSTELLO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE

SOLDIER'S ORPHAN:

A TALE.

CHAP. I.

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds, too late, that men betray,
What charm can sooth her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art, her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from ev'ry eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom—is to die.

GOLDSMITH.

LEAVING Lord Belmour, whom Louisa requested to wait a few minutes, she ascended to the chamber of the deceased with Mrs. Mason, where lay the mortal

remains of the beautiful Miss Conway. Serene and lovely in death, no trace of sorrow was on that countenance, so lately marked with its deepest lines; she appeared to have indeed, by the sweet placidity of her features,

"Wept her stains away."

As Louisa bent over the cold inanimate corse, and bedewed its pale face with her tears, she could not help reflecting on the goodness and mercy of God, who had thought proper to call her away from a life so truly wretched as hers must have been: endowed by him with so much sensibility, the remembrance of her past errors would have embittered her future life; but she now humbly trusted her penitence had been accepted, and that her sufferings in this life had atoned for her faults.

She also hoped it would serve as a useful lesson to Lord Belmour; for that

reason she had brought him with her; the sight of so lovely a woman falling in early youth a victim to his licentiousness, could not fail, she thought, of impressing his mind with contrition and horror against so dangerous a pursuit as that of seduction. It would also, she hoped, operate in favour of the infant, who was brought into the world unconnected with any living soul that any one knew of, except herself.

As soon, therefore, as she could compose her agitated spirits, she requested Lord Belmour would attend her in the chamber of death.

Lord Belmour, wondering what all this solemnity and symptoms of grief meant, and secretly wishing himself out of the house, followed the faltering steps of his conductress, who, approaching the bed, with a trembling hand removed the covering from the face of the dead, and

pointing to it, in a voice tremulous from various emotions, cried, "Lord Belmour, there lies your victim!"

Aghast with terror, his Lordship, (after gazing in breathless suspense for a few moments, as if to ascertain the identity of the object presented to his view,) struck his forehead with his clenched hands, and staggering fell extended on the bed, pale, and apparently as lifeless as the being he lamented.

Louisa, terrified at the effect the sudden shock had on him, repented not having prepared him for the sight he was to encounter; she applied herself to restore him, and happily succeeded; but his grief became then violent and bitter; he reproached himself with having murdered the only woman who had ever loved him, and franticly declared he could never survive the remembrance of his cruelty.

"That heavenly look!" (exclaimed

he, as he gazed on the pale victim of his duplicity), "will haunt me for ever, and plunge my soul into eternal perdition!" Wretch that I am, to have forsaken so much sweetness, so much innocence, and confiding goodness! Hate, abhor, Miss Fitzormond, a man so unworthy of your care, who meant to have destroyed you, as he has done this dear unfortunate girl. I am indeed a villain, unfit to live."

Grief and terror totally incapacitated Louisa, from offering to afford him any consolation: she could only weep. The sight of her tears flowing for him, and the lovely creature he had destroyed, quite subdued him; he wept in agony, and falling at her feet, besought her to forgive him the evil he had intended to attempt against herself.

As soon as her tears had ceased to flow, Louisa assured him of her forgiveness as to any intended injury to herself; and as his grief appeared truly sincere, she said, if

it would afford him any consolation, she would not withhold it on account of his conduct to Miss Conway.

"Your Lordship," continued she, "has many and great duties to fulfil; in the just discharge of them, your sincere repentance will be evinced. You have yet to learn that you are a father, and that the immediate cause of the loss you so deeply deplore, was occasioned by the birth of your infant. This, my Lord, is a sacred duty, which, if you discharge faithfully, may be some expiation for the ruin you brought on its mother.

Affected beyond expression, Lord Belmour could only entreat Louisa to see that every attention was paid to the infant; and once more casting an agonized look on the pale face, lovely even in death, that lay before him, he rushed out of the house, reached his stables, mounted his horse, and quitted Bath immediately. But his utmost speed could not divest his mind from

the shock he had received: mechanically he turned the head of the animal the road he had come a few hours before, and not till he arrived at the house of his friend, did he reflect that he was in a very unfit state to appear before his lady and her family.

Endeavouring therefore to assume as much composure as possible, he entered, and was immediately assailed with inquiries relative to his morning's expedition, which had been conducted with great secrecy.

Lady Belmour was very indignant that he should have left her the whole day without having informed her of his intended absence, and expressed her disapprobation in terms ill suited to sooth his irritated mind. He therefore replied haughtily, that he would not be accountable to any one for his actions, as he was perfectly capable of regulating them. But thinking some apology ne-

cessary to Mr. Wilmot, the gentleman at whose house he was staying, he said, addressing himself to him, that some business had unexpectedly called him away, and detained him much longer than he had intended, which, he trusted, would plead his excuse for having kept them waiting dinner for him, it being then two hours later than their usual time.

Mr. Wilmot very readily admitted his apology, and nothing more was said on the subject till after dinner, when Lady Stanley observed his Lordship had ate nothing, and she feared he had fatigued himself too much with riding, as he appeared very unwell.

Lord Belmour replied that might be the case, but it would go off, and making an exertion to overcome the shock his feelings had sustained, he, with the assistance of his friend's exhilarating champaign, so far succeeded as to prevent any further remarks being made.

Louisa, on being left by his Lordship, gave such directions as she thought proper for the interment of Miss Conway, and also for the care of her infant; Mrs. Mason having agreed to procure a nurse for it; and with a promise of coming the next day to see it, and a charge to keep the affair as quiet as possible, she took her leave; deeply impressed with the melancholy fate of so young and lovely a woman, and also with the forlorn and destitute situation of the infant, though the contrition of Lord Belmour was, she hoped, a propitious symptom in its favour.

The next day brought the whole family to Bath, and Lord Belmour took an early opportunity of entreating Louisa not to mention her having seen him the day before, or any of the events relating to Miss Conway and himself.

Louisa willingly promised not to men-

tion it to any part of the family. This she did, as much from a fear of giving pain to them, from a knowledge of his Lordship having acted so unworthily, as to oblige him, and conceal the disgrace of the departed Miss Conway, who had always appeared solicitous that the knowledge of her fault should be confined to the bosom of her to whom she herself had imparted it.

With the assistance of Lady Stanley's maid, who was acquainted with many of the circumstances relative to the deceased, Louisa was enabled to arrange every thing for the proper accommodation of the child.

Lord Belmour had himself seen that every respect was paid to the remains of its mother, and had discharged the necessary expense attending her interment: he also liberally rewarded Mrs. Mason for the trouble she had had, and for the kindness

she had shewn to her friendless inmate, when she could not have been stimulated by the hopes of reward.

The family of Lord Delville was now shortly expected at Bath, and as Walter Stanley was with them, it was of course thought that he would accompany them at the latter place. No great hopes were however entertained by his own family that he would very speedily gratify their wishes, by offering his hand to Lady Adelina. But when they learned he had gone to the castle, they imagined it was perhaps with an intention to do so.

In the mean while, Sir Walter appeared thoughtful and impatient: he frequently wrote to his son, but the answers he received did not seem to bring him much comfort; for, after reading them, his ill-humour generally increased. Louisa learned from Miss Stanley that the reason of her father's change of temper was occasioned

by her brother still delaying to make proposals to Lady Adelina. "It would afford us all the highest satisfaction," said Miss Stanley one day to Louisa, "if he would be prevailed on to offer her his hand. Lady Adelina is so truly amiable, that I am convinced she would make him very happy." "You think she loves him?" said Louisa with timidity: "I am certain she does," returned Miss Stanley; "and also that her happiness depends entirely on an union with him. Lord and Lady Delville are of the same opinion, and as their daughter is infinitely dear to them, nothing could give them so much pleasure as to see the marriage take place. When Walter arrived at the Castle, I thought he appeared unhappy, but I did not wish to tell my mother so; therefore pretended to think that the melancholy which Lord Belmour spoke of was occasioned by one who,

he knew, was willing to dissipate it: they thought as I wished them, that I alluded to Lady Adelina; but I am well aware his heart is fixed somewhere else. Poor fellow! I pity him, but can do nothing more. Sir Walter is determined he shall marry where he can obtain riches; and as that is the case, he cannot possibly do better than marry her."

Louisa conquered her feelings so far as to say she hoped he would find his happiness in contributing to that of his family.

Louisa had not written to Mr. Howard, as she had proposed, to acquaint him she wished to return. But she now immediately did: she also announced her intention to Lady Stanley, who, having the society of her favourite daughter, did not dissuade her from it. Sir Walter proposed accompanying her home, and an early day was fixed for her departure.

never be obliterated from my heart; but what I can do to expiate it, I will.

"But, my dear Miss Fitzormond," continued Lord Belmour, "I must beg of you to keep this affair secret; Lady Belmour is of so jealous and vindictive a disposition, that, should she know aught of this little girl, I am convinced she would not rest till I had discarded it, or she had, by some means, put it out of the way, lest my affection for it should supersede that for her."

Louisa here attempted to interrupt him, that she might vindicate Lady Belmour from the charge his lordship had, she trusted, unjustly brought against her; for though she knew her to be haughty, vain, and selfish, yet she could not believe her disposition really bad, as it must be, if she could oppress an innocent, defenceless infant.

Lord Belmour, aware of her intention, requested that she would not in-

terrupt him: "The goodness of your heart," said he, "makes you believe all are alike amiable; but a longer acquaintance with the world will convince you of your mistake. Armida's disposition is better known to me than to you; though I have not been so long acquainted with her as you have. This being the case, I must entreat you to conceal your knowledge of this affair from all the family: by so doing, you will not only insure my everlasting gratitude, but probably the life, as well as the welfare, of the child you are so solicitous about."

Seeing his lordship so very anxious to conceal the relationship of the infant to him, as well as the whole story of Miss Conway, Louisa promised to be silent on the subject to all, except Mr. Howard: to this Lord Belmour agreed, and exacting a promise from her that she would not, if questioned on the subject,

mention having seen him that night, he, with many protestations of respect, esteem, and gratitude, took his leave.

After his departure, Louisa requested Mrs. Mason not to tell any person who was the parent of the child; and giving her instructions where to write, to inform her of its welfare, and tenderly embracing it, and committing it to her particular care, Louisa returned to the Crescent, and had the satisfaction of finding the whole family still absent.

But she had not been seated in her room many minutes before they returned. She immediately went down to the drawing-room, to take leave of them again, as she was to set off early the next morning, though she had before done it previous to their going out.

On her entrance, Lady Belmour demanded, in a haughty tone, if she had seen her lord? "He quitted us soon after we entered the rooms," continued

her ladyship; "and I know no one so likely to have drawn him from our society as yourself, whose praises he is never weary of repeating."

"Armida," interrupted Lady Stanley, "you really forget yourself very much, in thus addressing Miss Fitzormond: it is very improbable that she should know any thing of Lord Belmour, whose quitting us after he had attended us to the rooms, ought not to be a matter of surprise or vexation to you. By those unreasonable ideas which you suffer yourself to entertain, you will destroy your health, your beauty, and the influence you still retain over the affections of your husband, as nothing so much tends to alienate affection as unfounded jealousy and ill humour. Respect, I entreat, my dear lovely child! the dignity of your situation; and do not let me have the mortification of seeing you an object of

pity, where you ought to be one of universal admiration and envy."

Louisa, during Lady Stanley's address to her daughter, had time to collect her ideas, which were totally put to flight by the vehemence of Lady Belmour. She detested the thoughts of uttering an untruth; but as her word was passed to Lord Belmour, she would not forfeit it by acknowledging she had seen him.

She, therefore, when again interrogated in a somewhat milder manner by Lady Belmour, answered, in a faltering tone, that her ladyship might know if he had been there, by inquiring of the servants.

Lady Stanley, who judged Louisa would not give a direct answer, from having been accosted in so rude a way, changed the discourse, by asking some question relative to her intended jour-

ney; and, giving her a message to Mr. Howard, took leave of her with the tenderest expressions of affection.

Lady Belmour too condescended to wish her a pleasant journey.

Louisa, her heart throbbing with emotion, and her eyes overflowing with tears, quitted the room, attended by Miss Stanley, who bitterly lamented the violence of her sister's temper, which had occasioned her so much pain.

"You, my dear Louisa," said Miss Stanley, "are too generous and good, to remember any thing Armida may say in the heat of passion; therefore I do not so much grieve for what she has said to you to-night, though it has very much vexed me, as I do for the misery which she is heaping on her own head, by her causeless jealousy.

"Lord Belmour is a man, of all others, least likely to be guided by a wife who acts as, I am sorry to say,

Armida does: her beauty first attracted his attention; the admiration she every where excites still flatters his predominant passion; but as the beauty she so eminently possesses becomes familiar to his eyes, and the admiration she meets with ceases to charm by its want of novelty, he will disregard the one, and be indifferent to the other; he will quit her society, for that of less meritorious females, perhaps in every point, except that of having art sufficient to render themselves more agreeable. Her affection for him is ardent and sincere; the slightest neglect will, therefore, occasion her the most poignant anguish, as she has never been accustomed to be thwarted in any thing: thus, with all her beauty, youth, riches and titles, she will be splendidly wretched."

Louisa could not differ in opinion from her friend; she, therefore, only said she hoped Lady Belmour would see the

folly of creating evils for herself in time, and prevent their fatal consequence.

In mutual profession of esteem and affection, and promises of writing to each other, Louisa and Miss Stanley passed the time till they were necessitated to separate.

When alone, Louisa blamed herself severely for having submitted to equivocate, when questioned by Lady Belmour relative to her having seen her lord. I need not, thought she, have told her ladyship where I had seen him; but certainly such a subterfuge was mean and unworthy: the respect I owe my own character should induce me always to speak openly. How much shall I rejoice to regain the dear quiet haunts of my youth! where, in the society of the best and most indulgent of friends, I shall not be exposed to the sarcasms of

pride and ill nature, or obliged to have concealments, which are equally offensive to my pride and delicacy.

As she reflected on this last idea, she almost regretted having known Miss Conway, or at least of having been made the confidant of her story. But then again, the remembrance of having, by her kind attention and sympathy, been the means of smoothing the death-bed of that unfortunate woman; of having been able to speak peace to her agonised mind, and tranquillise the fears she felt for the future welfare of the infant, whom she must, she knew, so soon leave—the remembrance of these circumstances were soothing to her mind, and almost reconciled her to the more unpleasant ones, to which she was subjected, in consequence of Lord Belmour being so much concerned with them. With a sigh she was compelled to acknowledge that

even the pleasure arising from the performance of a good action, is not without alloy.

"But granting that to be the case," said she, after a short pause, "let me never be so selfish as to let that thought deter me from doing good to others, when I have it in my power. In the performance of a benevolent action, the advantage of the receiver should only be considered. Every selfish idea should be banished." Wearied with reflection on the occurrences of the day, she at length fell asleep, and did not awake till summoned to set out on her return to Mr. Howard.

Nothing particular occurred during the journey, which Louisa was very anxious should be ended; and as she came near the village of M——, every stile, every tree, and hedge-row, was greeted with the smile of recognition; she felt afraid to turn her head a moment

from the window of the carriage, lest she should lose some object endeared to her by early habit and long familiarity; so strongly is the mind naturally attached to those scenes where we have passed the happy period of childhood. As we mix more in the world, and visit larger towns and populous cities, and are accustomed to splendid buildings, scenes of luxury, and every meretricious ornament that imposes on the senses, we smile at the simplicity with which we have formerly regarded objects now so trifling; we wonder how we could attach so much consequence to things so insignificant. Yet, detach us from the bustle and gaiety of the town, we feel again the same sweet emotion on visiting our native shades; unless, indeed, the mind has been rendered callous by the pressure of misfortune, or the baneful effects of vice.

With a sensation something like fear,

though of she knew not what, Louisa observed that the several peasants she met, who all bowed with every token of rustic respect, wore strong marks of concern on their countenances. She had scarcely time to form a conjecture on this unusual appearance, when the carriage stopped at the gate of the manor-house.

Her impatience to receive the paternal embrace of her friend would hardly admit of her waiting till the door of the carriage was opened; and when it was, with a heart bounding with delight and affection, she leaped out, and ran round to the back of the house, that she might surprise him by her appearance, before the sound of the carriage gave notice of her approach. Opening the well-known door of the study, which was from the lawn, she was struck with a chilling horror to find it vacant; no fire, or any appearance of its having been recently oc-

cupied. As it was the usual sitting-room of Mr. Howard, the most terrible apprehensions seized the mind of the affrighted girl, who trembling, and nearly fainting with emotion, sought the servants' apartment.

CHAP. II.

But oh! the heavy change! now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!

Many are the sayings of the wise,
In ancient and in modern books enroll'd,
Extolling patience as the truest fortitude;
And to the bearing well of all calamities,
All chances incident to man's frail life,
Consolations writ
With studied argument, and much persuasion sought,
Lenient of grief and anxious thought;
But with th' afflicted, in his pangs, their sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune
Harsh, and of dissonant mood from his complaint;
Unless he feel within
Some source of consolation from above,
Secret refreshings, that repair his strength,
And fainting spirits uphold.

MILTON.

ALL the lessons of fortitude and patience, the early friends of Louisa had instilled into her mind, were insufficient to support the afflicting intelligence she obtained on gaining the apartment occupied by the domestics.

"Dear Miss!" exclaimed the venerable old housekeeper, (starting from her chair, and advancing to embrace the beloved adopted child of her lamented master,) "at what a melancholy time you have returned; had you come a few hours sooner, you would have seen him alive, but, alas! it is all over: the best of men is gone, and these aged eyes shall never again see any thing like comfort!"

"Who is gone? what do you speak of?" cried Louisa in breathless agitation, and gazing wildly on the countenance of the weeping matron: "say not it is my father, my friend, my beloved protector! Oh! do not kill me by such information! You could not have been so cruel as to let him lay ill and die, without having sent to tell me of his danger!"

"We did send an express off this morning," sobbed Margeret, "but it was too late: a few hours after the man's departure, my dear master was seized with a

fit which carried him off without even a sigh. He was not aware of his danger till yesterday, when he desired you should be sent for: and, even then, was afraid of alarming you unnecessarily, as he said he thought it likely he should linger for some months."

She might have continued talking without interruption: Louisa was incapable of doing it; she sat, the pale image of despair: no tears came to relieve her bursting heart, or allay the burning agony of her brain: a cold dew sat on her temples; and a shivering seized her limbs.

Alarmed by symptoms so dangerous, poor old Margeret forgot the immediate cause of her grief, in anxiety for her dear young lady, for whom she felt an affection almost maternal. She had been present at the birth of Louisa, and had nursed her with the tenderest care. The sweetness of her disposition had endear-

ed her to all the dependents of Mr. Howard, but more particularly to old Margaret, to whom Louisa was very much attached on account of her fidelity to Mr. Howard as well as her kind attention to herself.

By the care of the worthy old housekeeper, Louisa recovered from a violent fever, that, spite of her excellent constitution, it had been greatly feared, would have precipitated her to an early grave.

During her illness, which had lasted some weeks, the last mournful duties had been paid to the sacred remains of her respected friend: the weakness and languor it had left, rendered her mind less irritable, and more resigned to the inevitable fate that awaited her, cast as she now must be on the protection of strangers, or the exertion of those talents she possessed for her support.

Her only consolation was, as she ad-

vanced to a state of convalescence, to converse with Margaret of her departed friend: from her she learned every particular relative to his illness, his death, and the tender anxiety he had expressed for her to the last.

"My dear young lady," said this affectionate creature, one day, when Louisa was lamenting her forlorn condition; "I am sure my master, who is now a saint in Heaven, would not have died so composed and happy, if he had not made some provision for you, whom he loved so dearly: had you been his own child, he could not have acted more like a tender father than he always has done to you: therefore, I am sure there are some unfair doings in this affair of the will. Well! well! we shall see; it will never come to good, if this relation of my dear master's has seized what he had no right to, and what he does not want, as he was rich enough before: he can have none

of the noble blood of the Howards in his veins, if he can stoop to do such a mean action."

"My good Margaret," said Louisa mildly, do not let your affection for me hurry you beyond the bounds of prudence and moderation; we have no just reason to suppose that Mr. Melford *has* uttered an untruth in saying there was no will left by Mr. Howard. I own I am surprised at it, as he was so exact in every thing, and I have repeatedly heard him say, a person who had any thing to leave, ought always to have it so arranged, that in case of death it should occasion no disturbance or contention: yet still he might have fallen into the error he condemned: if he has, the gratitude I owe him for past indulgence, and attention to my real welfare, in storing my mind with useful knowledge, and, above all, giving me a religious confidence in Him who protects the orphan, and

strengthens the mind to endure affliction, shall never suffer me to repine at not being longer provided for by him; neither will it permit me ever to hear a word said that can cast any reflection on the sacred and cherished name of him to whom I owe so much."

"Far be it from me," replied Margaret eagerly, "to say any thing that sounds like a reflection on the memory of my respected master. No! I knew his goodness too well to harbour for an instant a thought you would not like to hear: but I cannot say that of Mr. Melford: I do think, and I hope you will forgive me for saying so, that he has got a will made by Mr. Howard, in which you were named his heir; instead of this man, who calls himself his heir at law."

"And he is so, Margaret," replied Louisa—"you as well as myself know he is so." It is true, our lamented friend did not like him, for I have often heard

him lament the bad disposition of his relation; but Mr. Howard, notwithstanding, might not, indeed I am sure he *did* not, bear any ill-will towards him: therefore might not choose to leave what property he had from him, who was his nearest relation. However, let his motives have been what they may, his memory shall ever be held sacred by me, and his actions be thought just. I am of opinion yet that a will may be found; but as the arrival of Mr. Melford is, as you say, daily expected, we shall soon be convinced whether or no our conjectures are right: till then we will wave the subject, and speak of another not much less painful—I mean the unaccountable silence of the Stanley family: surely, they do not neglect to inquire after me, because I am now indeed a friendless orphan. My dearest Sabina, I am sure, would not let circumstances sway her to act so unkindly to the friend she has

always honoured with so large a share of her affection; yet it is strange that they should at this time forbear to interest themselves in my fate."

Here Margaret could afford her no consolation: she too had been surprised at not hearing from Lady Stanley, or any part of her family, to inquire how Louisa had borne her loss; but she had prudently avoided mentioning her surprise to her young lady, for fear of giving her pain.

With a sigh of pensive resignation, Louisa dismissed the subject as a topic for conversation; but it was not so readily to be dismissed from her mind. They are, thought she, too happily engaged to bestow a thought on me—a forlorn, deserted invalid: by this time, perhaps, Lady Adelina is added to their family: but how much must I have been mistaken in her character, as well as in that of her new sister, if mis-

fortune can alenate their affection from me. Well, be it so: if such is their disposition, I resign them without a murmur.

But though Louisa so heroically resolved to give up the gratifying consolation of believing those amiable women were still her friends, the bitter tears that coursed each other down her pale cheeks plainly expressed how painful the effort was.

In a few days the expected arrival of Mr. Melford was announced to her by Margaret, whose dejected countenance was a presage that he would no way supply to her the loss of so good a master.

Louisa, who read in the simple expressive face of the faithful domestic the melancholy forebodings that had taken possession of her soul, exerted herself to sooth the grief and dejection in which she so feelingly participated; and making an effort to subdue the apathy which illness

and sorrow had brought on her, she so far succeeded as to console Margaret, and quiet her apprehensions respecting Mr. Melford.

"Your long and faithful services will, I am convinced, insure you the approbation and esteem of the man who is now to take possession of what your late worthy master has left: he cannot, therefore, neglect to protect and provide for you, if it should be found that no provision has been made for your old age: yet, believe me, my dear Margaret, while I live, you shall share my fortune, if it is good; and if not, I trust I shall be able to provide for you, by recommending you to Lady Delville, who once promised me her assistance, should I ever stand in need of it: she can never befriend me more essentially than by taking you under her protection, for whose declining age I am solicitous to procure every

comfort which you have been accustomed to enjoy. But as we must shew every respect to Mr. Melford, as the relation of Mr. Howard, I beg you will let him know that I am ready and desirous of seeing him as soon as suits his convenience."

Margaret retired, and Louisa composed her spirits for the almost dreaded interview.

But her worst apprehensions were more than realized, by the sudden appearance of Mr. Melford: in his dark sharp eyes she read avarice and oppression legibly written: he was about forty years of age, tall and thin: the naturally dark hue of his complexion appeared sallowed by ill health, or the more corroding effects of malignant passions. Not a single trace of benevolence could be discovered in his cold countenance.

BIBLIOTECA BODLEIANA

Can a being so repulsive, thought Louisa, (as she arose, trembling, to meet him,) claim affinity with Mr. Howard, whose face was indicative of the virtues of his heart? Mild, affable, and humane, was the aspect of his features; and the dignified expression of his eyes was blended with the soft beam of compassion and the radiance of virtue. If the countenance is indeed a true index of the mind, (as I believe it is,) alas! how unlike is this man to him in every respect!

As those ideas passed rapidly through her mind, Mr. Melford advanced towards her, and observing the perturbation of her looks, requested that she would be seated, in a voice softer than she had thought he could possibly assume.

"I come not, Madam," continued he, "to alarm or distress you, as you must be aware, from my not having be-

fore this made known to you that I am, in consequence of my late uncle dying without a will, the rightful possessor of his property, which he might have greatly increased with his income, if he had not been so lavish: however, as that opinion seems to give you pain, I shall not repeat it; indeed I am not surprised at your grief for his loss; for he, as well as his late sister, have been very kind to you, and it would shew great want of feeling, if you were not grieved. As it no doubt was the intention of Mr. Howard to provide for you, had he lived, I shall now take that charge upon myself: not that I have the least obligation to do so; but I am interested by your appearance, and wish to shew that respect to his memory.

"You will, therefore, if you please, make up your mind to go home with me, as I have prepared Mrs. Melford to receive you: it is my intention to dis-

pose of the furniture and effects by auction; so, of course, you cannot stay here; but I presume you do not wish it, as it must be a melancholy place for you. Your recent illness prevented me giving you information before; though I have been desirous of settling the affairs of Mr. Howard, and quitting the house, for some time; as it is painful to me to be obliged to come on such an occasion, where I never was invited during the life-time of the late owner."

Louisa, who had rather impatiently listened to the long harangue of Mr. Melford, in which affected compassion was blended with resentment and insolence, now interrupted him, to inquire if he was certain that Mr. Howard had not left a will?

"Certain, Miss Fitzormond! What do you mean by such a question?" replied he, hastily, while a sudden flush of conscious guilt for a few moments

tinged the sallow hue of his complexion to a deep purple. "Is not my word sufficient to satisfy you that there was no will left? Yet, let me ask *you*, do you know of any being made?"

To this question, Louisa could only reply in the negative: yet she ventured to say, that she thought it improbable that Mr. Howard, who was very particular at all times in the arrangement of his affairs, should have neglected one of so much consequence.

"I am surprised at the circumstance," she continued, with energy, "because I have heard him say that his old servants should not be left destitute, if it should please the Almighty to call him from this life before them. Poor old Margaret, the housekeeper, who has been a faithful servant, I am particularly anxious about; and trust, if it is found that no provision has been made for her, that you will do for her what I

assure you it was Mr. Howard's intention to perform."

"As to that," replied Mr. Melford, "I don't conceive I am at all compelled to do it. I think, Madam, when I offer you (who are no relation whatever) my protection, you should be satisfied: doubtless Mr. Howard had cause to change his intention respecting this servant you speak of, or he would have done it, as he had time enough allowed. You recollect, Madam, his death was not sudden; for as I was informed, he had been lingering for some months."

"That is true," said Louisa, weeping as she reflected on her unfeeling conduct (as she termed it), in having left him to the care of servants. "You are right, Sir—I have no claim whatever on you—I owe every thing to the humanity of Mr. Howard, and I should be wanting in gratitude, if I expected more, or repined at any thing he thought proper to

do. For myself, I do not regret his having left me forlorn and destitute; but I lament for Margaret, who is old and feeble: the talents I possess will, I hope, procure me a respectable situation, either as governess in a family, or teacher in a school: till I can procure one or other of these situations, I will with gratitude accept the offer you have made me of your house, and the protection of Mrs. Melford."

"I entirely approve of your plan," replied Mr. Melford; "the expense and trouble that have been bestowed on your education should certainly be turned to some account. When I first came down here, which was as soon as I heard of the death of Mr. Howard, I found you too ill to attend to any thing; I therefore, in the presence of a professional man, whom I brought with me for the purpose, examined the papers of the deceased, and also every place

where we thought it probable a will might have been deposited: had you been able, certainly you should have been present; but as it was, it appeared unnecessary to delay our search. However, as you may know some parts of the house, where papers may have been kept that escaped our search, I should like you to examine every part carefully again; it will be a satisfaction to yourself, and me also." To this Louisa agreed, though she had but very faint hopes her search would be attended with success; but she was unwilling that any thing should be neglected that was likely to discover what, if found, would probably be attended with the most beneficial effects to poor old Margaret, for whom she was chiefly solicitous.

As she feared, her search was unattended with success: every private drawer was carefully examined, but to no purpose; and with a heavy heart, Louisa

was compelled to give up the slender hope she had till now entertained.

The time allowed her for preparation for her journey was so very short, that she had scarcely time to recollect she was going with a person, till that morning a perfect stranger, and far from prepossessing in his manners or appearance; that she was also going to be introduced to his family, alike strangers to her; who probably might be as little calculated as he was to sooth the distress of her mind, occasioned by the late unfortunate occurrences. But when she did reflect on the novelty of her situation, her soul sickened with apprehension at the idea of the many mortifications she was likely to encounter.

"Yet whither," cried she, clasping her hands in agony, "can I go, if I do not accept the offer of Mr. Melford? Every thing here is his! Lady Stanley seems to have abandoned me to my ad-

verse fate: even her daughter, whom I believed so good, and so little likely to be influenced by the caprice to which women of fashion are subject, seems in this instance to have forgotten her wonted benevolence, and given up her friend because she is in distress.

"I cannot, therefore, fly to them, though, at this time, when I have the accumulated misfortunes to be labouring under bodily and mental pain, the society of a sympathising friend would tend to alleviate part of the load of grief that oppresses me.

"Spirit of my dear departed friend," cried she, elevating her hands and eyes, "if from thy radiant seat of bliss, thou art permitted to behold the grief of those who were dear to thee, when in this world of sorrow, look down on the child of thy adoption and unremitting care! Infuse a portion of thy meek

spirit of fortitude and submission to the will of the all-wise disposer of misery and bliss into her weak and bewildered heart. Oh! guide her erring feet in the way that is right, and continue to watch over her, that she may not deviate from the path of virtue, pointed out to her by thy example as well as precept, while she was blessed with thy society and counsel in life."

The entrance of Margaret put a period to the mournful soliloquy she had indulged.

"My dear young lady," cried this affectionate creature, "you are going from the care of your old nurse, I hear, to morrow morning: alas! I fear I shall never see you again; but God will protect and bless you, because you are good. You will, I am much afraid, have reason to lament having put yourself under the care of those you have; but if you would take

my advice, you would not go now; it is not too late to withdraw your promise of going; you might very well stay at Farmer Worthy's till the family at the hall come back, when I warrant they would not let you go among strangers, when you are so low-spirited, and stand in need of every kind of tenderness, which, I am sure, you will not meet with from Mr. Melford, nor, I dare say, from his wife either."

Louisa assured Margaret she could not now retract the consent she had given to Mr. Melford's proposal, for which she felt much obliged, as he really could have no motive in offering it, but a view to serve her. She with many tears then took a tender farewel of her who had from infancy loved her with a sincere affection; and promising not to be unmindful of her former intention respecting her, retired with an aching heart to her pillow; but the bitter remembrance that it was to

be the last night she was to repose beneath that roof, rendered dear to her by so many affecting, tender circumstances, entirely precluded all inclination to sleep.

CHAP. III.

Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile;
And cry content to that which grieves my heart;
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears;
And frame my face to all occasions.

SHAKESPEAR.

Alas! her gentle nature was not made
To buffet with adversity.

ROWE.

IT may be thought necessary by some to give the history of Mr. Melford. We shall therefore do it as briefly as possible, as the veneration, in which we hold the character of Mr. Howard, makes us unwilling to dwell long on the bad propensities of any one claiming affinity with him; for though the virtues of the father, or head of a family, may influence the conduct of those who have the benefit of their example, yet it does not al-

ways extend its benign effects to every branch of the same stock.

This was the case with regard to Mr. Melford. He was the only son of a sister of Mr. Howard's, who married, when very young, a man of mean family, but large property, which had been acquired in one of the West India settlements. At an early age he had the misfortune to lose his mother, who was an amiable, accomplished woman. His father, who still applied assiduously to business, thought he performed his duty religiously, if he paid liberally for the education of his son at a reputable school, where he was treated with kindness, and taught the mere forms of good breeding, as well as the rudiments of learning. He did not wish his son, he said, to be a scholar; he had never known any good come of it. "Let him be able to write an intelligible letter, and cast accounts," said his father, "and I shall be satisfied: I never knew

more myself, and am now one of the richest men upon 'change. But once make him a scholar, and away goes every desire to be a rich man."

But though this lover of money and despiser of learning extolled the advantages of the one, and depreciated the possessors of the other, he did not recommend the practice of those virtues which have the power to exalt the heart, by softening it to the woes of others. The morals of his son were never once thought of; nor was the master, under whom Charles Melford was placed, remarkable either for his attention to the religious duties of his pupils, or for the neglect of them. It is true, they all went regularly to church every Sunday, and when there, they were obliged to behave orderly and pay attention: but when they have no other instruction given them than what they receive at church, which boys pay so little regard to, not much good can be expected from them.

except they are, as it were, by nature addicted to virtue.

Unfortunately, Charles Melford was not so disposed: the seeds of every vice appeared early to have taken root in his mind. The hand of a skilful cultivator of the youthful heart might have extirpated them, and in their place have implanted the more valuable ones of knowledge and virtue; but he had not that advantage: left in a manner to his own guidance, the baneful passions of extravagance, oppression, pride, and deceit,

Grew with his growth, and strengthen'd with his strength:

and when at the age of eighteen he was left the uncontrouled master of a plentiful fortune, he launched out into every species of dissipation and folly.

Mr. Howard had frequently expressed a wish to have the direction of his nephew's education; but this was precisely what his father objected to. No

very cordial intimacy had ever subsisted between him and his brother-in-law, as their pursuits were so diametrically opposite; and Mr. Melford frequently declared he would rather keep his son in total ignorance than permit him to be educated by his uncle, who would make him as learned and romantic as himself.

Mr. Howard, therefore, seldom saw either Mr. Melford or his son: and when, on the death of the former, he wrote to young Melford, condoling with him on his loss, and giving him the most tender and friendly advice relative to his future conduct; his condolements were treated with indifference, and his advice with contempt.

Several years rolled on, and each succeeding one brought renewed pain to the heart of Mr. Howard for the profligacy of his nephew. At length he heard that the immense fortune left him by his fond father was nearly dissipated; and

that the young man had gone to the West Indies to attempt to retrieve, in some measure, the fortune he had lost, by a strict attention to his estates which still remained there; but so deeply was he involved in debt by gaming, that it was thought almost impossible he would ever be able to return to his native country.

It not unfrequently happens that persons of a sordid, selfish mind, go from one extreme to another. This was now the case with Mr. Melford. From a spendthrift he became the slave of avarice; and in the scene he had chosen to perform the work of reformation, he had ample room to bring into action all the lurking evil propensities of his mind. Here he could tyrannize with impunity; and he let no occasion slip of indulging the cruelty of his nature.

Neither did fortune, who appears sometimes to favour the wicked in preference to the good, refuse him her aid in the

present undertaking;—he rapidly grew rich, but his name was detested throughout the whole island for severity and oppression. He was shunned by all, with the exception of one person: this was the rich widow of a planter, as remarkable for the severity of her discipline as for the disagreeable qualities of her mind and person.

A similarity of disposition soon united those two persons in an intimacy that terminated in marriage; her wealth and his frugality in a few years encreased the amount of their possessions to more than an equality with his original fortune.

Mr. Melford and his wife, therefore, prepared to return to England; their estates were disposed of, and every thing put in train, when Mrs. Melford was seized with a distemper that proved fatal in a few days.

The grief of the widower was not so violent as to prevent him from following;

his intended plan: he returned to his native land richer than he had left it, but still no better man.

The relations of Mrs. Melford insisted on his refunding part of the property he possessed from her, as she had left no child; but he was fully prepared to resist this demand; and in a law-suit instituted by them against him, he proved his late wife had invested him with the whole of her property at the time of their marriage. Many of those relations were in a state of indigence; but he humourously observed they had been accustomed to it; therefore, they should continue so for what he should do for them, as a punishment for having dared to doubt his right and title to his wife's property.

Though avarice still continued his ruling passion, his old attachment to gaming returned on his residence in the metropolis: he lost considerable sums re-

peatedly, and had much impaired his fortune, when chance again threw him in the way of a rich widow, whom he shortly married.

Some circumstances he had learned from this his second wife made him desirous of getting acquainted with the *protégé* of his uncle: but as every degree of communication had been cut off since his first departure from England, he had but a faint hope of succeeding, when the illness of Mr. Howard, which had reached him from persons he had placed near the latter to give every information of their movements at the manor-house, brought him repeatedly into that part of the country; and on the death of that estimable man, he immediately came forward and claimed his right as the nearest relative of the deceased.

The illness of Miss Fitzormond, on his arrival, favoured his scheme of getting her into his power, as he had taken care

to secrete the will he found, which was made entirely in her favour, except leaving legacies to the servants. The whole of Mr. Howard's property, amounting to five thousand pounds, was bequeathed to her. Mr. Melford's motive for thus reducing to indigence the innocent child of his uncle's adoption will be seen hereafter.

At the appointed hour next day, Louisa, accompanied by Mr. Melford, left the peaceful abode of her happy childhood. The melancholy that had pervaded her mind on leaving it a few months before, occurred to her remembrance, and she wept bitterly, as she thought of the events that had taken place since that time, of which she then believed her fears were sad presentiments.

Mr. Melford was civil and attentive during their journey; but his being so appeared to Louisa rather as a task imposed on himself, than as the sponta-

neous effects of good will, or the common forms of politeness.

Louisa blamed herself for entertaining ideas so hostile to the gratitude which she endeavoured to persuade herself she ought to feel towards him for his voluntary offer of protection. Yet she could not divest her mind of the unfavourable impression which his first appearance had made on her.

On their arrival in London, where Louisa had never before been, her attention was diverted from herself entirely by the busy faces continually passing; all appearing eagerly bent on business or pleasure, and all, as she thought, wearing a brow unclouded by grief or discontent. The many elegant mansions she passed in their way to Bedford-Row, (the place where Mr. Melford's house was,) from Hyde Park Corner, and the splendid carriages and other appearances

of opulence, all impressed her mind with an idea that here every body was happy, and in the words of her favourite Goldsmith, she exclaimed—

> Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy !
> Sure these denote one universal joy !

She did not pause to reflect seriously that it was only the fair side of the picture she beheld, as the carriage passed rapidly along the streets, thronged with well-dressed passengers. Could she have beheld the many shivering, houseless wretches, whose miseries are increased by the sight of that profusion in which they must not share, or the aching hearts of many of those apparently happy, she would have owned that no situation, however splendid, was exempt from care. But happily, the youthful mind does not suspect, or look for, more wretchedness than is presented to the eye: if

they did, short indeed would be their days of happiness in this life, which is so fertile with woes.

Mrs. Melford received Louisa, on her arrival, with a kind of frowning civility and involuntary respect, which her appearance was well calculated to inspire in a vulgar mind, such as that of the person to whom she was now introduced.

Mrs. Melford was a short, thick, rosy-faced, mean-looking woman, about the same age as her husband: her little grey eyes were expressive of cunning, but tempered with a degree of good-humour, that took off the disagreeable effect occasioned by the former.

She congratulated Louisa on her arrival in London, which she supposed she must think a *prodigious* fine place, and vastly more pleasant than a dull old-fashioned mansion-house, which she dared to say was haunted, as most of *them* old places *was*.

"Come, Miss," said she, "cheer up, we shall soon make you forget all your troubles, I warrant, now we have got you to London; where there *is* so many fine things to divert a person's melancholy, as one may say. I am sure, when my dear Mr. Courland died, *I* don't know what I should have done, if I had not *a com'd* to London."

"Courland!" said Louisa, "are *you* related to any one of that name?

"Yes, sure," replied the lady, "that was my name before I married Mr. Melford; 'Squire Courland of Cumberland was my first husband."

Louisa felt something like regret, to be obliged to own, even to herself, that a being so vulgar should be the only person with whom she could claim any degree of affinity. Yet she conquered her disgust by the recollection, that even that circumstance ought not to render her unthankful to Providence, for having

raised her up a friend in a female relation, at a time when she stood so much in need of one.

Impressed with this idea, she addressed Mrs. Melford as her aunt; and expressed her surprise that Mr. Melford had not apprised her of the pleasure that awaited her.

"Why, to tell the truth," answered she, "it was not the wish of Mr. Melford that you should be made acquainted with that circumstance: as you had never been acknowledged by your father's relation, he thought it as well that you should remain unacknowledged by me, at least for the present."

The entrance of Mr. Melford changed the conversation, which was not renewed that evening. When Louisa retired for the night, she had sufficient to employ her thoughts, and keep sleep from her eyes.

She wondered much that Mr. Howard

had never informed her his nephew had married the widow of Mr. Courland; but the fact was, he had never known it: so little communication had passed between them, that it was not announced to him. It was also matter of surprise to her, that Mr. Melford should wish to conceal from her the relative situation in which his wife stood towards her. "But I suppose his motive for that," said she, "proceeds from his parsimonious disposition; he is fearful that I should lay claim to their protection and support on that account. She was confirmed in this opinion, by the readiness with which he had agreed to her plan of providing for herself, by procuring the situation of a governess or teacher in a school: he had even recommended it as the most eligible thing for her.

"Mercenary man!" exclaimed Louisa, the native dignity of her character rising

as she reflected on his meanness, in thus wishing her to enter on a world with which she was so little fitted by habit or education to encounter the rude shocks to which a situation so dependant would necessarily expose her. "He shall not be disappointed! I will not owe an obligation to a being so sordid: he has yet to learn that a generous mind rises superior to the groveling views of such a heart as his. The mind can make its own happiness in any situation, however menial, provided it is not contaminated with vice, or debased by meanness."

Thus reflecting, she resolved to mention her intended plan the next day to Mrs. Melford, and request her to assist her in procuring such a situation as she conceived her abilities adapted to.

Her mind being thus wrought up to meet every disagreeable or mortifying event with composure and resignation, she sketched a scene of calm contentment

in her fancy, from which she fondly believed nothing could wean her mind. Old Margaret should be provided for from a part of her salary; she should not want; and should she meet with any of those friends once so dear to her, she could meet them with that dignified composure arising from conscious virtue, and a confidence in her own energy, that was not to be subdued by the wavering frowns of fickle fortune. One image at this moment presented itself to her mind in all the charms in which youthful enthusiasm delights to adorn the object of a first love: for a few minutes the remembrance of past happiness, with which this object was so intimately connected, bedewed her eyes with tears of bitter anguish; but recollecting it was criminal to indulge those thoughts, as he was probably now the husband of another, she commended herself to the protecting care of him who

sooths the afflicted and innocent, and resigned herself to the arms of balmy sleep.

In order to explain the circumstance of Louisa's relationship to Mrs. Melford, it is necessary to go back, and give some account of her parents.

CHAP. IV.

—Wooing thee, I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags;
And 'tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at.

SHAKESPEAR.

ALFRED FITZORMOND was descended from an ancient and honourable family in the west of Ireland; but, unfortunately, the possessions that had two or three centuries back given weight and importance to an unblemished name, were now so much impaired, that a small estate, which he possessed in right of his mother as a younger son, was all his inheritance.

At an early age, he was left an orphan, and consigned to the care of his maternal uncle, a man possessed of immense riches, which he had accumu-

lated by trade: he resided on an estate which he had purchased in Cumberland, in one of the most beautiful parts of the county, but quite secluded from society, as his nearest neighbour, a nobleman of vast landed estate, had taken offence, when Mr. Courland, the uncle of Fitzormond, first came to reside near him, at some part of the conduct of the latter.

Their dispute had originated in a very trivial circumstance, respecting a piece of ground which Mr. Courland wished to purchase of the Earl of Belhaven, thinking it was necessary to complete the improvements which he was making in the pleasure-grounds around his house. The Earl, either from pride, or some other motive, would not part with it: Mr. Courland, much irritated, sent a message to the Earl, highly offensive to his dignity; the Earl's answer in return was haughty and supercilious:

the one priding himself on his birth, the other on his riches, they by degrees grew open enemies. The Earl's influence in the county being superior to Mr. Courland's, the principal people ranged themselves on his side, and Mr. Courland had the mortification to find himself, though abounding in every thing that in the general estimation of the world constitutes happiness, neglected and forlorn.

In some measure, this was owing to his natural disposition, which was morose and overbearing: he had never paid any attention to the cultivation of his mind, or endeavoured to correct the asperities of his temper. Misfortune, which sometimes softens the most obdurate heart, had never assailed him in any way. he had embarked in commerce, and had been successful; his health had been always good, and, in short, he had passed through life free from care. He

was about fifty years of age, had never been married, and always expressed a particular dislike to the marriage state.

If he had ever felt an affection for any being but himself, it was for his nephew, Alfred Fitzormond, to whom he was godfather, and whom he said he would make his heir, if he proved himself deserving of his affection: he had him educated at a public school, and no expense was spared to render him a scholar and an accomplished gentleman; in both which he succeeded as far as the most anxious parent could desire. Fitzormond very soon betrayed a predilection in favour of the army, and was gratified in his choice of a profession by his uncle, who purchased a commission for him in a regiment of infantry.

To the graces of his mind, Alfred Fitzormond added a person formed to captivate: his figure was a model of manly beauty, uniting elegance and strength;

his features regular, and his countenance animated; the expression of his dark eyes were tempered with peculiar sweetness, but when offended, or provoked by unjust treatment, they flashed with indignant fire, and never failed to strike with awe the offender. He was brave, generous, and disinterested, ardent in his affections, and faithful in his friendships.

To his uncle he was firmly attached both by a sentiment of gratitude and inclination, as he had ever to him been kind and generous; though he was not blind to his imperfections, which he considered as resulting from habits at his time of life not easily got rid of, rather than as arising from a bad disposition.

Fitzormond was passionately fond of a military life: he had been engaged in actual service more than once, in which he had acquired great reputation for his

gallantry, coolness, and promptitude; but when circumstances admitted of his absence from his regimental duty, he devoted his time entirely to his uncle, where, in his society, and the amusements a country life affords, he passed some of the most agreeable hours of his life.

In one of his visits to his uncle, he became known to Lady Louisa Montford, only daughter of the Earl of Belhaven, the professed enemy of Mr. Courland—a trifling incident brought them acquainted: he was one day with his uncle, fishing, in one of the beautiful lakes in this county, near which was the residence of the latter, when a pleasure-boat, gaily decorated, with a band of music on board, passed them. Mr. Courland, who immediately knew it to belong to the Earl of Belhaven, uttered a peevish exclamation, and requested his nephew to give over his amusement and

retire, as he did not wish again to encounter them; and added, the sight of every thing belonging to that proud man was particularly disagreeable to him.

Fitzormond, who had never had reason to dislike the family of the Earl, and who conceived that the prejudice of his uncle was rather unreasonable, did not obey him with his usual alacrity. This inattention to his uncle's commands might have been occasioned by some little curiosity which had taken possession of his mind, to have a nearer view of the ladies in the vessel, several of whom appeared very elegant women.

Be this as it may, he certainly delayed putting their boat back to the shore till that of the Earl, by another tack, was again brought near them.

Fitzormond's eyes and whole soul were instantly rivetted on the face of one of the ladies, who appeared to regard him

for a short time with equal attention; but, on observing his ardent gaze, suddenly turned away, as if she thought it was occasioned by the particular attention with which she had beheld him.

Spite of his uncle's frowning looks, he continued to gaze on the fair being till the boat was too far from him to distinguish her lovely features; then turning to him, he asked who that beautiful creature was? "Do you think," vociferated Mr. Courland, "that I would look at any one belonging to that man? No; and I command you, as you value my affection, that you forbear to speak to me of them again. What, I suppose you are going to fall in love with the girl, who I imagine is old Pedigree's daughter! But have a care; you know how I detest the whole family: let me tell him, I can, if I chuse, give as much money to my nephew as he can to his whole family, with all his pride

and contempt of what he has been pleased to call upstart plebeianism."

Fitzormond, knowing how irritable his uncle was, when any thing occurred to introduce the subject of the Earl of Belhaven, did not say any thing in reply, but busied himself in pushing their boat to land, and trying to divert his attention to some other object: he at length succeeded in calming the irritation of Mr. Courland, but not the tumults in his own breast.

The look with which the fair daughter of the Earl, as he believed she was, had regarded him, sunk deep in his heart; he recalled it with pleasure to his fancy, and was not weary of dwelling on it. He thought he had never seen so beautiful a woman, and deeply lamented the circumstance which had occasioned a dissension between the two families.

However he resolved not to give up the hope of again seeing the lady who had

made so deep an impression on him; and if he was so fortunate as to obtain the honour of her acquaintance, he imagined he should be the happiest of men.

In his frequent visits into Cumberland he had formed some slight acquaintance with several of the neighbouring gentlemen. But as they did not visit his uncle, he had not taken much pains to cultivate the good opinion they appeared to entertain of him. But now he determined to embrace every opportunity that offered of being better acquainted, hoping it would be the means of his meeting the lady he so much admired.

One family in particular he had heard his uncle mention in bitter terms, because they were related to the Earl. To this family then he resolved to get introduced, and doubted not it would be the means of introducing him to Lady Louisa.

It was not long before he was able to accomplish his intention: Mr. Maxwell,

the gentleman alluded to, having been much pleased with the appearance and elegant manners of Fitzormond, had frequently paid him particular attention, and meeting him shortly after the circumstance which had disturbed the hitherto serene breast of the young soldier, he invited him to his house, and introduced him to his lady—a most amiable woman, and niece to the Earl of Belhaven.

From her Fitzormond had the satisfaction to hear, that Lady Louisa's beautiful person was the least of her merits; her mental qualifications being superior even to her personal charms.

Fitzormond's good sense and interesting manners very soon rendered him a great favourite with Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell. The latter declared to her husband, he was just the man she should like to chuse for a husband for her cousin, Lady Louisa; as she discovered a great similarity in their dispositions.

Mr. Maxwell was of the same opinion; but the dislike which the Earl bore to Fitzormond's uncle could, he feared, never be got over.

As he had anticipated, Fitzormond shortly became acquainted with Lady Louisa, and found it impossible to resist loving her; her conversation was so engaging, her manners so elegant, and her temper so gentle, that the most cold-hearted being living must have been pleased with her. And the confiding innocent friendship with which she honoured him rendered the fascination complete.

His visits to the house of Mr. Maxwell, where he was sure to meet her, were frequent and long; there he had the pleasure of walking with her, and attending to her lively and sensible remarks. The musick of her voice, the charming vivacity of her manner, and the irresistible loveliness of her smiling

blue eyes, had power to make him forget every thing but herself; even the fulminations of his uncle were in her society totally forgotten. But when necessity compelled them to separate, when Lady Louisa was obliged to return to the castle, and Fitzormond to his uncle, then it was that he lamented his dependant situation, and the inexorable temper of him who had it so amply in his power to contribute to his happiness; but who had repeatedly of late hinted his determination of abandoning him, and cutting him off with a shilling, if he dared to form a connection so offensive.

The frequent absence of Fitzormond from home had betrayed to his uncle the new acquaintance he had formed; and when the latter questioned him on the subject, and declared his dislike of every person connected with the Earl, the noble spirit of his nephew, which scorned concealment, would no longer

suffer him to disguise his real sentiments. He expressed his opinion of Mr. Maxwell and his family in the warmest terms of approbation; and of Lady Louisa, as a being of a superior order, to whom his heart had been entirely devoted, since the moment he had the happiness of knowing her excellencies; that nothing should tempt him to forego the hope he had entertained of making an interest in her heart; and should he be so fortunate, he should consider it a blessing which would supply the loss of every other good. He declared that his sincere respect and attachment to his uncle had been the only reason which had hitherto prevented him from throwing himself at the feet of her he so tenderly loved, and soliciting a return of affection; but he had hoped, when his uncle knew how very amiable she was, and how necessary to ensure the happiness of a nephew he had always professed to love, that

he should be able to obtain his consent to his addressing her, which would doubly enhance the satisfaction her acceptance of his suit would afford him.

In the utmost rage, Mr. Courland declared, that his aversion to the whole family was so firmly fixed, that nothing should alter it; that he had vowed never to relax his resentment of the affront he had received from the Earl, and was still determined to adhere to it; that, dear as his nephew had always been to him, he would cast him off from his affection for ever, without a particle of regret, if he continued to entertain sentiments so repugnant to his feelings. Did he think that his wealth should go to enrich the family of Belhaven? or, that he would be mean enough to make the first advances towards a reconciliation with his greatest enemy? No! sooner would he see his nephew perish, and his whole fortune bestowed upon beggars.

The love Fitzormond talked of, he said, was romantic and ridiculous; that it was beneath a man of spirit to entertain; and that if he valued his friendship, he would dismiss it from his mind for ever: if not, he was no longer to consider himself a nephew of his; and finally, he threatened to take measures that should prevent him ruining himself, and for ever disoblige him.

Much as Fitzormond loved his uncle, he could not brook this violent and contumelious language, or think of giving up that love which he found dearer to his heart than any thing else in life; sooner, he felt; he could resign his existence to please his uncle, than his affection for Lady Louisa.

He now considered his uncle selfish and unjust in his resentments; and, therefore, no longer to be regarded in an affair which concerned his own happiness so intimately: he determined hence-

forward to be guided by his own sense of right and wrong; and if his uncle still continued his unreasonable dislike, and withheld his approbation and friendship, he would shake off the fetters of dependance, and rely only on himself to advance his fortune.

He was a soldier, and might make his way in life by his bravery; it did not become him to sacrifice his happiness to the capricious humours of any one. To do it too from interested views was derogatory to the dignity of his character, and he would not demean himself by such a consideration.

But the thoughts of reducing Lady Louisa from affluence to the humble mediocrity he could offer her, unassisted by his uncle, was painful in the highest degree, and almost made him resolve to give up what the threats of being deprived of for himself could not for a moment make him consent to do.

The Earl, he feared, would be no less violent against the union of his daughter with Mr. Courland's nephew than he was, though the only objection he could raise was his affinity to him, as from his father he inherited as noble blood as that which flowed in the veins of the Earl.

Distracted with doubts and fears, he wandered, almost unknowing whither he went, to the house of Mr. Maxwell, where the first person he saw was the beauteous object that engrossed all his thoughts. She was walking by herself in the lawn before the house, and at his approach advanced to meet him with such an air of satisfaction, and so much pleasure in her countenance, that he instantly forgot all his anxieties on her account, and thought only of the happiness of being loved by a being so truly estimable. She invited him to join her in a walk, with so much sweetness and

confiding innocence, that Fitzormond could no longer resist the powerful temptation that assailed him, to know his fate from her own lips; and to declare that his heart was devoted to her service, and entreat a return of affection, without which, he said, life was burthensome to him; but blessed with her love, he should be the happiest of mortals, and the business of his life should be to contribute to her welfare.

The soft eyes and blushing cheek of Lady Louisa told him that this declaration was not unpleasing to him, and that she felt a passion pure and ardent as his own; but her tongue refused to confirm what they had so sweetly declared; and till that was done, Fitzormond found his happiness incomplete.

He begged her therefore most earnestly not to keep him in suspence, but, with her wonted goodness, either at once to destroy the hopes he had fondly ventured to

entertain, or to exalt him to the highest felicity by confirming them.

Thus urged, she falteringly declared he was dear to her, and ever should be; but she feared her father would never approve of her bestowing her affections on a man so nearly related to Mr. Courland, to whom he bore a decided aversion; "An aversion," she continued, "I have used every endeavour to conquer, but without effect."

Fitzormond, elated with having obtained the love of Lady Louisa, returned to his uncle in the happiest frame of mind. No evil could now assail him, he believed, but through her; and that she might never know any, he most fervently desired.

Mr. Courland received him with apparent kindness, and Fitzormond began to hope that his resentment was giving way to his love for him. This idea gave additional satisfaction to that which he

already experienced: could he obtain his uncle's approbation, he felt he should have nothing more to ask for.

Several days he continued under this pleasing delusion, and did not fail to inspire Lady Louisa with a portion of his sanguine expectation, that one of their dearest connections, if not both, would be brought to consent to their union. Indeed he could hardly forbear hoping but that the concessions of Mr. Courland would ensure the favour of the Earl.

But a few days after, an order very unusual, and totally unexpected, came for Fitzormond to join his regiment immediately. As the time was not expired which had been granted him to absent himself, he was much surprised, and could not help thinking his uncle had procured the order for his return. However, as it was peremptory, he prepared to obey it with a heavy heart, convinced now of the obduracy of Mr.

Courland; and the folly of his late expectations.

To part with Lady Louisa was a severe trial to him, and not less so to her. But they endeavoured to console themselves with the hopes of future happiness, which time might perhaps have in store for them, and to lessen the pains of absence by a constant correspondence. She promised to communicate every circumstance to him that might tend to promote the accomplishment of their mutual wishes.

The Earl of Belhaven was generally confined by ill health, which had prevented him from knowing of the intimacy that subsisted between Fitzormond and his daughter, till after the absence of the former from Cumberland; when some officious person informed him of their frequent meetings at the house of Mr. Maxwell.

His astonishment was great at hearing this, as he had not the slightest suspicion that Fitzormond visited his niece and her husband so familiarly. He recollected how much time his daughter had lately spent there, and trembled for the event.

But he determined to interrogate her on the subject, and make known to her his disapprobation of her forming an acquaintance with persons unknown to him. This he took an early opportunity of doing, and found by her answers the information he had received was too well founded. But not aware of the extent of the misconduct of his daughter (as he termed it), he contented himself for the present with warning her of the danger she incurred by being regardless in future of his strict injunctions.

Lady Louisa, sensible that she had acted imprudently, and finding it too late to retrieve her fault, could only la-

ment in silence the mistaken prejudice of her father, which was likely to occasion her so much unhappiness.

The Earl, thinking to prevent the meetings of his daughter and Fitzormond, if he should again come into Cumberland, resolved to unite her to a nobleman who had for some time been soliciting the honour of her hand.

As she had strongly objected to it before she knew Fitzormond, her father was unwilling to put a force on her inclinations; therefore had forborne to press her on the subject. But now he considered no time should be lost. In consequence he ordered her to prepare to receive for a husband the man he knew she disliked, as he imagined it would be the means of preserving the honour of his family.

Lady Louisa received this intimation with the most heart-rending sorrow; she assured her father she could not consent

to give her hand to a man she not only was indifferent to, but whom she disliked; and thinking to prevail on him to desist from this importunity, she declared that her affections were irrevocably engaged; but that she would promise him most solemnly never to marry without his consent, if he would allow her to remain single.

To this the Earl was deaf, and insisted that she should within ten days give her hand to the man he had chosen for her. Lord Montford, her only brother, joined his father in urging her compliance; the nobleman they wished her to marry being a particular friend of the latter

It was in vain that she wept and prayed: no entreaties could make them alter their determination, and poor Lady Louisa, seeing no other way to escape the tyranny of her father and brother, wrote to Fitzormond, informing him of

the danger that awaited her, and implored him to hasten to rescue her from a misfortune so fatal to their loves.

Fitzormond with difficulty procured leave of absence for a short time: he flew into Cumberland on the wings of impatience and affright, lest he should have the dearest object of his heart torn from him; and arrived only two days before that appointed for the ceremony taking place.

He contrived to conceal himself from the knowledge of his uncle, and gave intimation of his arrival to Lady Louisa, who consented to meet him privately. The result of this interview was that she agreed to leave the abode of her father, and bestow her hand on her lover, who was to have every thing necessary for her departure ready the next evening.

Nothing happening to prevent them from putting their design in execution, at the time appointed she left her father's house,

and as soon as possible after was the wife of Fitzormond; who, possessed of her, thought not of fortune, but considered himself the happiest of all created beings.

Lady Louisa shortly after wrote to her father to inform him of the step she had taken, which nothing but his determining to force her to marry against her inclination, she said, could have had power to make her do. She concluded with imploring his forgiveness, without which she could never taste of real happiness.

To her inexpressible grief he did not deign to answer her letter, but directed Lord Montford to inform her he never would forgive her: that if she did not wish to receive his curse, she would forbear attempting to alter his fixed determination. He should from henceforth consider her as dead; and if she crossed his recollection, it would only be to remind him of his misfor-

tune in having a daughter who had made him unhappy, and deprived herself wilfully of his affection by her disobedience.

His Lordship concluded with condemning most severely the step she had taken, and the contempt with which she had treated his friend.

Lady Louisa was deeply afflicted at this intelligence; for she tenderly loved her father and brother: she made several attempts to regain the affection of the latter, but without success: he also continued to withhold his forgiveness. Her only consolation was in the tender and, if possible, increased affection of her husband, and the friendship of Mrs. Maxwell, who promised to let no opportunity pass of interceding with her father in her behalf: but at present the Earl was so much incensed, that the attempt was impracticable.

Fitzormond also informed his uncle

of his marriage, in terms the most conciliating and submissive; but he was as obdurate as the Earl of Belhaven: though differing on every other point, in this they were perfectly agreed.

Mr. Cowland immediately altered his will, which had been made in favour of his nephew: he forbade him his house, and charged all his domestics and dependants never to mention his name in his presence.

Thus were Fitzormond and his young and lovely wife thrown on the world without the means of support, save what arose from his pay as a captain in the army (which every body acquainted with the subject must know is inadequate to support the rank of a gentleman); and a small estate in Ireland, which devolved to him on the demise of a distant relation.

But young and sanguine, they hoped that by the interference of friends their offence in time would be forgiven; and

as they centred their happiness in each other, they thought, if they had sufficient for their present wants, it was all that was necessary. Their affection for each other was pure, ardent, and sincere: it was not the effervescence of passion; it emanated from a more sublime source; it was founded on mutual esteem, and a conviction of the innate worth of each other. Nothing was wanting to render their happiness permanent, but the forgiveness of their relatives.

But time passed rapidly, and no appearance of it taking place, Lady Louisa, who sighed for a reconciliation with her family, so desirable both for her husband and herself, grew dejected; the tender attentions of Fitzormond had not power entirely to divert her mind from dwelling on a subject so painful as the displeasure of her only parent.

For Fitzormond, too, her tears would flow, when she reflected she had been the

means of estranging him from his uncle, and as she thought of the addition she should ere long make to his family, the joy she would have felt in more fortunate circumstances was, in the present, a new source of uneasiness.

Both of them having been always accustomed to live in affluence, and not aware of the expense attending it, while they thought they were practising the utmost economy, they were in fact greatly exceeding their very limited income. The consequence was, that they were soon involved in a number of debts; to discharge these, and contribute to the comfort of his adored wife, Fitzormond, unknown to her, sold his property in Ireland, which enabled him to conceal from her the ruin that was with hasty strides advancing to overwhelm them.

At this time, the regiment to which Fitzormond belonged was ordered on a foreign station. They loved each other

too tenderly to think of separating, therefore made every necessary arrangement for their voyage, and prepared to quit their native country with satisfaction, as it no longer held relatives who were interested in their welfare, and they hoped it would be the means of rescuing them from inevitable distress. They were on the road to embark; when an accident happened, which proved fatal to their love, but happily raised them up a sincere friend in the benevolent Mr. Howard.

When they were within a few miles of the seaport from whence they were to take shipping, they were overtaken with a violent tempest, which had threatened to come on for some hours past; but as they were desirous of arriving at the end of their journey that night, they would not let the unfavourable aspect of the weather prevent them from putting their design in execution: they accordingly

proceeded; but had not gone many miles from the stage where they last changed horses, when the storm came on with such fury as to threaten destruction to every thing exposed to its violence. The day had long closed, and the road, which the driver of the chaise declared was unknown to him, appeared nearly impassable, from the quantity of rain which had lately fallen.

Fitzormond became alarmed for the safety of his wife, and was just on the point of ordering the chaise to stop, that he might endeavour to obtain some certain information of their road, when a flash of lightning, accompanied by the most awful peal of thunder, startled the already terrified horses, and rendered them totally ungovernable: plunging with violence, the chaise was in an instant overturned, and Lady Louisa Fitzormond, he feared, was dreadfully wounded, if not deprived of life. Though agonized on her ac-

count, he succeeded in extricating her from her perilous situation, and seeing a light at some distance, took her in his arms, and bore her towards it, uncertain whither or not her life yet remained.

As the accident happened within a short distance of the village of M——, the house where Fitzormond had observed the light to appear, proved to be that of Mr. Howard, who was just retiring for the night. Alarmed by a violent ringing at his gate, he immediately descended, and summoning a servant to attend him, went himself to offer the shelter he imagined it was meant to demand.

His surprise was great when he beheld a gentleman supporting the apparently lifeless body of a female in his arms; who, briefly acquainting him with the accident which had occurred, entreated him to afford them shelter and assistance

for the lady, of whose recovery he declared himself to be doubtful.

Mr. Howard, with the benevolence that marked all his actions, instantly assisted the lady into the house, and apprising his sister of the unfortunate circumstance, procured her immediate aid, which he hoped would be efficacious in restoring her, as he believed she was only in a severe fainting fit. This proved to be the case; but the injury she had received, Mrs. Martha feared, would, in her situation, be attended with serious consequences. As soon as Lady Louisa was restored to her senses, and found her husband had sustained no very material injury, she declared herself capable of proceeding; but this Mrs. Martha would not suffer: she was therefore prevailed on to retire to rest for that night, and Fitzormond, who had informed Mr. Howard how he was situated, was at length

compelled to give up his intention of reaching the sea-port, till his lady was in a more proper state to accompany him: he therefore left her to the care of Mrs. Martha, and was shewn by Mr. Howard to another chamber.

When alone, his distress not allowing him to take repose, he threw himself on a chair near a window, and sat for some time immersed in thoughts the most distressing: foremost of the group of painful images which presented themselves to his imagination, was the beauteous figure of his wife, fainting and wounded, as he had lately seen her; yet, in the midst of her pain, only solicitous for him. "Dear, lovely, unfortunate victim of pride and insatiable hatred!" exclaimed he, clasping his hands in agony, "to what misery has my fatal love condemned thee! But for me, thou hadst been now cherished in the bosom of thy family, secure from

every evil to which thou hast subjected thyself, by following the fortunes of a soldier, whose profession unavoidably exposes thee to perils and dangers of which this is only the forerunner; or, perhaps, which is still more dreadful to think of, the man for whom thou hast forsaken friends, fortune, and home, may be doomed to fall, and leave thee unprotected in a strange country!"

Thus distracted with present misfortunes, and anticipating still greater, Fitzormond passed the first hours after retiring: but, by degrees, his spirits became more tranquil, the tumult of his mind subsided, and hope's sweet, soothing voice whispered peace to his agitated soul; it suggested dreams of future bliss, and scenes of domestic happiness, never, alas! to be realized.

The violence of the storm had spent itself; the rain, which before poured in torrents, had now quite ceased, and the

thunder no longer rolled in awful majesty; but the wind in hollow murmurs was dying away, or only gently sighing among the lofty trees in the avenue. The moon, sometimes shining full in the room where Fitzormond sat, and then again nearly obscured by a flitting cloud, added a pensive beauty to the surrounding scenery, over which it shed a silvery hue.

Fitzormond, who was an enthusiastic admirer of nature, was imperceptibly drawn to contemplate the scene before him, which had helped to tranquillize his spirits. But this calm was of short duration; he was destined to encounter a trial the most severe and afflicting: from a reverie, into which he had been plunged, by contemplating the wonderful works of God, he was roused by a noise, as of people passing hastily to and fro in the passage. Alarmed for the safety of his beloved wife, he darted

out of the room, to make inquiries concerning her, and found his worst fears verified. The lady, he was informed, was so very ill, that it was deemed necessary to call in the aid of a person able to assist her in the dangerous and critical situation she was in.

Such assistance as the village afforded was soon obtained; but, alas! no human aid could save her—her life was ebbing apace: in a few hours, the wretched husband was informed that he was a father, but that the mother of the babe (thus prematurely brought into a world of sorrow), it was feared, could not possibly survive: but that the short time she had to live, she wished to be spent with him whom she had fondly hoped to pass a long life with.

To describe the anguish of Fitzormond is impossible; those only can conceive it who, like him, have possessed a treasure they valued superior to the gifts

of fortune—the treasure of an amiable, affectionate woman's heart; and who, like him, have seen her torn from him in the bloom of youth.

In frantic grief he flew to the chamber of death; but what an agonizing sight for him who loved so tenderly! She who so lately was blooming in youth and beauty now lay before him—

"All pale and wan, in ev'ry feature death;"

yet serene and placid as the infant by her side.

At his approach, she extended her hand towards him. "Dearest, best of friends!" said she, "Oh! in pity suppress your grief! Endeavour to subdue those violent emotions, and exert the noble fortitude you so eminently possess, to preserve your life for the benefit of this dear pledge of our unfortunate love! It has pleased the Almighty Disposer of all events to take

me from you; but as what he thinks fit must be for our good, this, I trust, will ultimately prove so to you—it may be the means of reconciling you to your uncle;—and surely my father will not extend his anger to me beyond the grave:—when he hears the fate of the daughter he once tenderly loved, may he forgive her only fault—and receive and cherish her child!—Should he not, I conjure you, my beloved friend, by the love you have borne me, protect and love her;—watch over her infant years, and as she advances in life, store her mind with virtuous knowledge; forget, for my sake, the unkindness of my parent, and teach her to revere him.—But, good and amiable as you are, I know I need not urge the subject further:—I die secure in the confidence that you will do all which an expiring mother can desire.

"And oh! Almighty God! grant that

this dear child," continued she, "may be a comfort to the only parent she will ever know!—may she live to sooth his declining years, and in some measure repay him for the load of anguish her ill-fated mother has heaped upon him."

Bathing its innocent face with tears of maternal affection, and pressing it in her enfeebled arms, she made an effort to present it to her husband, who, kneeling by her, vowed most solemnly to devote his life to the welfare of the child, rendered doubly dear to him by its dire misfortune, and his own irreparable loss.

"This is indeed the bitterness of death," sighed the expiring youthful mother; "but I trust, my beloved husband, we shall meet again in realms of never-ending happiness. Our separation, compared with eternity, will be but short. Oh! endeavour then to bear the trial allotted you,

and raise your thoughts to that state of felicity we shall hereafter enjoy."

We draw a veil over the closing scene of this unfortunate lady, and the heart-rending sorrow of her afflicted husband, and return to the worthy Howard, who, finding the sensibility of his nature painfully awakened by the misfortunes of his guest, resolved to alleviate as much as was in his power those troubles it was not in human nature to cure. In concert with his sister, who felt no less tenderly interested for the fate of an infant born in their house, and thus deprived of one parent by death, and on the point of being separated from the other, he determined to take charge of it, and to protect it with a parent's care.

Mr. Howard, well knowing the inefficacy of reasoning with a person in his situation, contented himself with condoling with him on his irreparable loss,

and by gentle persuasions prevailed on him to leave the silent and dismal chamber of death. By degrees he succeeded in drawing his attention to the future welfare of his child: this had more power to divert his mind from the shock it had received, than any argument he could have made use of; but he lamented bitterly the necessity that would compel him to leave her to the care of strangers, till he could effect some arrangements to admit of her being near him.

Mr. Howard, as he had previously settled to do, now offered to take upon himself the care of the little stranger, and assured the anxious father every possible tenderness should be shewn her, during his absence, both by himself and his sister. He also promised him that he would see the last mournful duties paid to its deceased mother.

By the advice of Mr. Howard, Fitzormond now prepared to pursue his

journey, which did not admit of longer delay than the accident had already occasioned: a chaise being procured for that purpose, he threw himself into it, in a state little short of distraction; but deeply impressed with the goodness of him who, though a stranger, had, in his utmost distress, thus with unexampled benevolence befriended him.

On his arrival at the sea-port, he found the ship ready to sail: he went instantly on board, and in a few hours was far distant from all that remained to him of the woman he had loved with more than even youthful affection. From the last place they touched at in England, he wrote to the friendly and benevolent Howard, gave him a short history of his wife and himself, and commending his little girl to his protecting care, and that of his amiable sister Mrs. Martha, requested she might be called Louisa, that being the name of his lost wife. He further

assured Mr. Howard, he would annually remit a sum sufficient for her maintenance, if he was not fortunate enough to return to Europe in a short time, which he anxiously wished to do on her account; or else, all places were the same to him, who, like a wounded deer, carried an arrow rankling in his heart.

He had the satisfaction to hear from Mr. Howard, before the vessel quitted the port from whence he had written, that his little cherub was well; that they had provided a proper nurse for her; and also that the rites of burial had been bestowed, with every mark of respect, on her ill-fated mother.

For two years after his departure, Mr. Howard received letters by every conveyance to Europe. In the last received, Captain Fitzormond lamented that the nature of the service he was employed in would not admit of his immediate return to England; but hoped,

after the next campaign, he should be able to do it with honour; though, at the same time, he declared nothing but the dying request of his wife, that he would attend to the infancy of his child, could have power to draw him back to a country where his every hope of happiness had been so fatally wrecked. But compliance with her wishes, which he held sacred, as well as his own inclination to love and protect the child of his adored wife, would certainly hasten his return, as soon as he could do it with propriety.

His letters were strongly expressive of the gratitude with which Mr. Howard's kindness had inspired him, and the satisfaction it gave him to hear his little girl was doing so well.

From that time no letters had been received from him, nor any intelligence whatever. Mr. Howard had not failed to make every inquiry which prudence

and humanity could dictate, but all he learned by those inquiries, was that the regiment to which Fitzormond was attached was sent, with some others, up the country; that they had succeeded in their design, but it was with the loss of a great many brave officers and men: among the former Fitzormond was missing; but whether he had fallen in battle, or was among those who were taken prisoners, was not known; but it was generally believed he was killed.

This intelligence was very afflicting to Mr. Howard: he had been strongly prepossessed in favour of Fitzormond, from the time he became known to him: his misfortunes first interested him, and his letters afterwards confirmed the good opinion he had conceived of him. The death of a meritorious young man could not fail to affect the compassionate heart of Mr. Howard under any circumstances;

but in the present case, it was particularly distressing to him.

The little Louisa, he now firmly believed, was indeed an orphan: he therefore considered she had a greater claim on his tenderness, and from thenceforward determined to adopt her for his own.

CHAP. V.

Since I must bid the world adieu,
Let me my former life review.

GAY.

WHEN Mr. Howard had entirely given up the expectation of again hearing from Captain Fitzormond, he thought it a duty he owed to the child under his protection, to endeavour to obtain for her the countenance of some of her natural friends: for this purpose, he wrote to Mr. Courland, informing him of the occurrences which had placed the child of his nephew under his care, and did not fail to urge every plea which his humanity could suggest, to induce him to atone to the child for the injustice he had done her father, in resenting so severely a fault so very venial. To this letter he

received the following answer, which entirely precluded all hopes of ever obtaining his protection for her, and gave Mr. Howard a just idea of the vindictive disposition of the writer:

"*To the Revd. Mr. Howard.*

"SIR,

I have received your letter of the 20th instant, and beg leave to inform you, that when the young man who calls himself my nephew, forfeited that title by his obstinacy in marrying the daughter of a man I detested, I swore solemnly I would never forgive him, nor acknowledge either his wife or children (if he should have any): this oath I am resolved to abide by: no intreaties or representations shall ever have power to make me alter my resolution, which is firmly fixed.

To prevent his daughter ever having any

expectation from me, I must inform you I have taken a wife myself, and hope to have descendants of my own, to inherit my fortune. But if I should not, I would rather endow an hospital with it, than that it should enrich a descendant of the Earl of Belhaven.

"I have the honour to remain

"Sir,

"Your very humble servant,

"GODFREY COURLAND."

The wife he had chosen as an instrument of punishment to his nephew was the daughter of a favourite servant: she had officiated in that capacity herself; and as to great good humour and abject adulation, she added much art, she contrived to insinuate herself into the good graces of her master. She was not remarkable for the beauty of her person or face; but as she was young and healthy, the wish of Mr. Courland

to obtain an heir was likely, as he thought, to be accomplished. But in this his dearest hope he was not gratified; several years passed, and still he remained childless: yet his anger towards Fitzormond did not abate, but rather appeared to render him more vindictive.

As age and its consequent infirmities advanced on him, his partiality for his young wife seemed to increase. The unremitting attention she continued to pay to all his complaints, as well as the patience with which she bore his caprices and morose humours, certainly entitled her to his gratitude, which he did not withhold: but could he have read her heart, he would have seen that self influenced all her actions; that she submitted to the present evils with patience, that she might at his decease, which she saw was fast approaching, and which she daily longed for, enjoy

unrestrained the affluence she then hoped to possess.

That time at length arrived; but a few days before it took place, the thoughts of a future state, which will intrude on a mind however hardened, made Mr. Courland take a retrospective view of his past life. He saw little there to entitle him to claim forgiveness for his offences: he had never forgiven an injury, how then could he dare to hope that he should obtain it?

Thinking to make some expiation for his faults, he expressed a desire to alter his will, and declared his regret that he had not forgiven his nephew before he left his own country, never again to return.

Alarmed lest all her forbearance should be rendered nugatory, by her husband's late repentance, Mrs. Courland doubled her assiduities, and appeared overwhelmed with grief for the loss she was about

to sustain, in being separated from so good a husband.

Her tears, and, as he thought, unfeigned distress, had the desired effect in diverting him from his intention of altering his will in favour of his nephew's child, till it was too late: when he found the pains of death approaching, he expressed again the same desire; but he was unable to execute it; he could only exact a solemn promise from his wife, that she would pay the daughter of his nephew ten thousand pounds, and at her death leave her the whole of the property bequeathed to her by him.

This Mrs. Courland promised faithfully to perform; and with this assurance her husband was satisfied, and in a short time after breathed his last.

When Mrs. Courland found herself a widow, with an affluent fortune, entirely at her own disposal, she resolved to leave Cumberland, and reside in fu-

ture in London, or near it, that she might partake of its amusements, which she had always represented to her imagination as so delightful: but as she was totally unconnected with persons in genteel life, her enjoyments were confined to places of public entertainments, and visits to such persons as she had got introduction to from others in the country, in an inferior situation. The secluded life Mr. Courland led had not given his wife any opportunity to form connections likely to refine her manners or improve her mind; she was, therefore, when a rich widow, as unlike a gentlewoman as she had been before Mr. Courland took her from the humble situation she was formed by nature to fill with more credit than that to which he had raised her. She retained still all the meanness of her original state; and as she had when young nothing to give, now she could not bear to do it: she therefore

delayed from time to time making Louisa acquainted with her late husband's wish, till at last she gave up the intention, and comforted herself with saying it would be time enough at her death to do it, as she should perform her promise by making a will in her favour.

Accident brought her acquainted with Mr. Melford, and as he soon found she was worthy his attention, he took pains to cultivate her good opinion; in which he succeeded, and they were shortly married. But previous to this event, she informed him of the promise made to her former husband, and her intention to adhere to it so far as to make Miss Fitzormond her heir.

Mr. Melford did not much admire this superstitious regard to her word, as he considered it; but finding she did not seem inclined to give up the point, he thought how he might be able to turn it to his own advantage.

Mr. Melford had a natural son, of

whom he was extravagantly fond. It therefore immediately occurred to him, that if he could procure Louisa Fitzormond for a wife for this son, he should secure his own wife's fortune to him.

But to render this scheme practicable, it was necessary to get Louisa into his power. This he had little chance of doing during Mr. Howard's life, as he was sure, even should he plead his wife's affinity to her, that gentleman would not give her up to him.

While he pondered on this subject, and laid plans to accomplish his project, the death of Mr. Howard, and the subsequent illness of Louisa, afforded a more favourable opportunity than he had even dared to hope for. Her illness enabled him to secrete the will of Mr. Howard, and thereby deprive her of the independence that worthy man had secured to her. His motive for making her believe she was wholly dependant on

him was to secure her gratitude, and render her less likely to object to his intended proposal of uniting her to his son.

His ready concurrence and recommendation of her providing for herself arose from the same motive; he believed she would gladly embrace his offer when there was no alternative between that and earning her subsistence in a state of dependance.

CHAP. VI.

Alas! what ignorant sin have I committed?

A man in all the world's new fashions planted,
That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;
One whom the music of his own vain tongue
Doth ravish, like enchanting harmony;
A man of compliments, whom right and wrong
Have chosé as umpire of their mutiny.

SHAKESPEAR.

As she had proposed, Louisa the next day took an early opportunity of mentioning the plan she meant to pursue, and solicited Mrs. Melford to aid her with her advice and recommendation.

Mrs. Melford, who, it appeared, had been apprised of her intention, requested she would give up all thoughts of removing from her for the present.

"Mr. Melford and I have had some conversation on that subject," replied

the lady, "and we have agreed that it is better on many accounts that you should continue with us: I have very little society, and I think you will be pretty company for me, for I am often very dull when left alone; and as you are a relation of mine, it is, we think, more respectable for you to stay with me than to live with strangers: though you have no fortune, nobody knows what may happen."

This last remark she added with a significant shrug, and a look she intended should be very arch.

Louisa, though she disliked the idea of being considered in the light of a poor dependant relation of Mrs. Melford's, nevertheless consented to remain with her, at least till she recovered from the state of weakness in which her violent indisposition had left her.

As soon as Louisa recovered from the fatigue of her journey, and was able to compose her spirits for the occasion,

she wrote to Lady Stanley to inform her of her change of situation, as she still entertained a faint idea that she was unacquainted with her loss. She also wrote to Miss Stanley, and gently hinted the pain she had suffered in being apparently forgotten by friends so dear to her as they were.

To those letters she received answers that were more distressing than her worst surmises had led her to fear.

That from Lady Stanley was cool and humiliating, and the one from her daughter reserved and polite.

Lady Stanley, after expressing her sorrow for the death of Mr. Howard, added, that she was glad to hear Louisa had met with a relation, under whose protection she might remain with credit; and she advised her, as a friend, to be careful not to disturb the quiet of a family again, as she had that of hers. It concluded with saying, that she

wished to decline all further correspondence with her, as did her daughter, on whom she laid her commands not to answer any more of her letters.

Totally unable to account for this inexplicable letter of her ladyship's, Louisa felt her heart sicken at the contemptuous manner in which she was treated; but the consciousness of innocence supported her; and she resolved not to let it wholly subdue her, but to try and forget she had ever known persons who could, for no reason on her part, act so cruelly towards her.

She accordingly, after the first shock was over, applied herself assiduously to some employment: she never gave way to indolence, well aware that that was the greatest enemy to real repose.

The attention she paid to Mrs. Melford was perfectly free from adulation; but the natural effects resulting from an ingenuous and grateful heart so far won

on that lady, that she declared she could not exist without her. Mr. Melford, too, appeared to regard her with more interest than the apathy of his nature allowed him to bestow on any object except money.

To Louisa their manners were coarse and disgusting: accustomed as she had ever been to the mild, sensible, and instructive conversation of Mr. Howard, and the polished society of the Stanleys, she felt the difference sensibly: she also felt her own superiority; but she had too much good sense to let those feel it with whom she resided, and to whom she imagined herself obliged for a home and support: to them she was humble without meanness, and dignified without pride.

She had resided at Mr. Melford's house about three weeks, during which time she had seen scarcely any person but their own family; when one morning at

breakfast Mr. Melford announced the expected arrival of his son (whom he chose to call his nephew) in town.

Mrs. Melford took this opportunity of extolling the many amiable qualities of the young man, who was a great favourite of hers: she assured Louisa that he was a very sensible, clever fellow; and she was sure she would like him. "When he comes," continued Mrs. Melford, "we can have little snug concerts at home, as Frank is dotingly fond of music; indeed he plays on the violin charmingly, and has a very sweet voice. But what pleases me best is to hear him recite poetry: Oh! you will be delighted with his manner of reciting *Alonza the brave and the fair Imogene*; he makes it thrill quite through you."

Louisa endeavoured to suppress the smile this catalogue of excellencies excited: but felt her risible faculties were not in such good subjection.

Mrs. Melford was so earnest in the praise of the young man, that she did not perceive the injury she was doing the cause she meant to promote; for, before she had concluded, Louisa had prepared her mind to meet a most egregious coxcomb.

Mr. Melford, not less blind to the foibles of his son, listened with evident pleasure to the praises bestowed on him; and secretly exulted in the certainty he felt, that the immense riches his wife possessed would ultimately become the property of his accomplished son.

Louisa, perfectly indifferent about him, as she was well assured, from the description given of him by his aunt, that he could not be a person whose society would afford her any satisfaction, thought no more of him or his wonderful abilities.

But she soon found that though he was not calculated to amuse and delight

her by his wit and vivacity, he was likely to prove a source of vexation to her in an eminent degree.

A short time previous to the usual dinner-hour of Mr. Melford, the vaunted youth was announced and introduced to Louisa, as the favourite nephew of Mr. Melford: with the degree of relationship in which she stood to the family he appeared well acquainted; as indeed he was, having been informed by his father of the good fortune that awaited him, if he took care to render himself agreeable to the young lady.

As diffidence made no part of the young man's character, he came prepared to see, and to conquer: not thinking for a moment that a young lady, who supposed herself without fortune, would hesitate to accept the attentions of a man so elegant as himself, and heir to so rich a man as Mr. Melford was well known to be.

Impressed with those self-important ideas, he advanced with easy confidence to Louisa, and addressing her in an affected tone of admiration, expressed the felicity he experienced in being honoured with her acquaintance; a felicity, he flattered himself, he knew how to appretiate; and which it should be the study of his future life not to esteem less than he did at the present moment.

Disgusted with the flippancy of his manner, which was wholly new to her, Louisa only coolly bowed to his high-flown compliments, and addressed herself to Mr. Melford: but his vanity was not so slightly put on as to be discomposed by the frigid air that accompanied the looks of her to whom he was resolved to be very attentive. He therefore determined to persevere, nothing doubting but he should obtain the prize.

In person, Mr. Frank Melford was about the middle size; and had he

not taken pains to distort his limbs by affecting fashionable attitudes, he might have passed as a tolerably well-made man. His features, and the contour of his face, were in the same style of mediocrity; but by the curvature of his elbows, which formed a semicircle, projecting out on each side, and the twist of his knees, occasioned by the same elegant idea, that to turn in the toes constitutes grace, contrary to the rules of nature and the dancing-master, he had deformed his figure as much as he had his face, by making his stiff black hair (which was naturally inclined to descend humbly down his forehead),

> . . . . . Stand on end
> Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:

and giving it also an insipid expression by a constant simper, which was designed to show teeth as white as unremitting

care could make them. Those little elegant appendages, a tooth-pick, and a small tortoiseshell comb to apply to his whiskers, were seldom long out of his hands; probably as much to show the delicacy of the latter, as to adjust those concerns so important to a beau.

Added to those affectations, every foppery of dress, which the caprice of fashion is daily inventing, was adopted by him with scrupulous exactitude.

Unwilling as Louisa was to listen to the conversation of a person she disliked, yet politeness compelled her to do it, as the party was so small, no one being added to divert his attention from her; and she could not withhold hers entirely from so favoured a guest of her friends.

With extreme regret she heard he was to become an inmate with her, as Mr. Melford's house was his chief residence, when he was in town.

"No, Madam; twice that sum could not induce me to give my hand to a man whom my heart and reason alike disapproved; I should be happy to oblige you, if it was in my power, but it is not. I am truly grateful to you, for your generous and undeserved intentions in my favour, but thanks are all I have to bestow."

"And is it possible," said Mrs. Melford, "that a girl, without sixpence she can call her own, can refuse a husband, who will have an immense fortune; and ten thousand pounds for herself, independent of him; and all for the paltry reason of not having any affection for him? Why, child, do you think I had any affection for your great uncle? Yet I married him when I was of your age, and never repented of it, though I had, what many people would have called a miserable life of it; he being so old and infirm: but here is a young man,

and one that half the fine ladies in town would jump at, and you refuse him, because, forsooth, you have not similar tastes: give up such romantic fancies, and be a sensible woman. Tastes, indeed, and hearts approving!—I thought you had more sense."

Quite out of breath with the vehemence of her utterance, and the effects of her surprise, at hearing a young woman, as she said, without sixpence, reject a proposal so advantageous, from principle, Mrs. Melford paused, and Louisa had an opportunity of saying that she could not presume to judge of the motive which induced her aunt to marry, without having an affection for Mr. Courland; but as she said she had never repented the step she had taken, she might, she thought, reasonably infer that their union was founded upon mutual esteem. If she felt that sentiment towards Mr. Frank Melford, she should not give so

decided a negative to the proposal now made her, as she really was not so romantic as to suppose a strong attachment the only thing necessary to constitute happiness in the married state: neither was she totally indifferent to the enjoyments which an ample fortune bestows on its possessors; the want of it abridging the power of doing good, as well as subjecting persons to much inconvenience and distress; particularly if, like her, they had been brought up in a way to unfit them from applying to those resources the indigent have.

Here they were interrupted by the entrance of the person who formed the subject of their discourse; and Mrs. Melford, who was unwilling to relinquish the project she had so much approved of, as in the accomplishment of it she should gratify her avarice in keeping Louisa's fortune in the family, and also allay some qualms of conscience she at

times found very troublesome, whispered Louisa not to take any notice of what had passed between them.

Louisa, who felt really distressed that she should occasion Mrs. Melford any uneasiness, readily agreed to comply, hoping there was no foundation for the intimation she had given her of Mr. Melford's intentions; indeed, as she revolved it in her mind, she was more convinced there could be none. As she thought it improbable he would wish to unite her to his nephew, whom he knew to be without fortune, she thought it equally improbable that he would consent to Mrs. Melford's promise of giving her one.

Young Melford, who appeared very solicitous upon all occasions to insinuate himself into the good opinion of Louisa, now informed her a piece was to be performed that evening at Drury-lane theatre, which he had heard her express

a desire to see, and begged he might have the honour of attending her and her aunt for that purpose.

To this proposal Mrs. Melford acceded with evident pleasure, and Louisa, though she would gladly have dispensed with the company of young Melford, agreed to join them.

It was now the month of February, and the town very full: as the piece to be performed was a favourite with the public, the house was uncommonly crowded. Louisa felt her spirits elevated by the gaiety of the scene; she therefore gave way to the natural cheerfulness of her disposition, and conversed with her companions with unusual vivacity, when her attention was not directed towards the stage.

At the conclusion of the fourth act, she was surprised by hearing her own name pronounced by some person near

her, and turning her head, she saw Lord Belmour making his way over the benches towards her.

His Lordship's countenance was animated with the satisfaction he felt at seeing her, and the warmth of his expressions denoted that his friendship for her was not diminished by change of circumstances or length of absence.

Louisa's gaiety immediately forsook her; she trembled and turned pale, and only in a faltering voice could return a short answer to the inquiries of his Lordship after her health, and his expressions of happiness at seeing her look so well.

Her perturbation was observed by Lord Belmour, who, imputing it to her sudden surprise at seeing him, apologized for his intrusion, in a voice and manner so tender, that Louisa could scarcely restrain her tears while she informed him the sight of him had recalled the remembrance of the severe loss she had sustained so for-

cibly to her mind, as to occasion her present agitation.

She made some general inquiries after his family, and that of Sir Walter Stanley, but avoided entering into any particulars, as she felt her pride revolt at the idea of the unworthy manner in which she had been treated by them.

Lord Belmour was equally silent on the subject, but with some degree of raillery reproached her for not having inquired after her little friend at Bath. "I assure you," continued he, she grows a fine girl, and bids fair to equal the beauty of somebody you knew."

Louisa sighed, as she in her turn apologized for the reason she had given to deserve his reproach: the sigh, his lordship understood as it was meant, a tribute to the memory of the unfortunate mother.

Their attention was now called to the business of the stage: but Louisa had

lost all interest in the fate of the mimic heroine: her thoughts had fled back to those days of peace she had enjoyed at M——, ere she knew Lord Belmour. From the period of his first arrival there she had not tasted happiness, yet she could not accuse him of having been the cause of her disquiet, but rather imputed it to a wayward destiny that seemed to be marked out for her, in which he innocently was condemned to constitute a part.

The mortifications she had met with from Lady Belmour, she rightly judged, were occasioned by the admiration of Lord Belmour: and the neglect and insult of Lady Stanley, she feared, arose from the same circumstance; yet, knowing how innocent she was of having by coquetry, or any other art, endeavoured to obtain that admiration, she was unwilling to allow that to be their motive for acting as they had done towards her.

Peculiar circumstances had thrown Lord Belmour more in her way than she entirely approved; but as humanity for his child, left destitute by the death of its mother, induced her to use her utmost endeavour to interest his compassion for it, she was justified in her own mind, for having been in situations to have private interviews with him: but now that object was attained, it would, she allowed, be more prudent to avoid every appearance of particular intimacy; well aware that to avoid censure, the surest method is, not only to shun carefully every thing that deserves it, but also every thing that may give a pretence to create it.

Lord Belmour kept his seat behind Louisa, and at the conclusion of the play, succeeded in drawing her from her reverie: he had attempted it before, but without success.

Louisa, who had taken her resolution,

was distantly polite; and to avoid being longer in his company, complained to Mrs. Melford of a pain in her head, and expressed a wish to go home; to which Mrs. Melford assented.

As she stood up for that purpose, she accidentally cast her eyes on a box at some distance, where sat Lady Belmour, Lady Adelina, and Walter Stanley: the eyes of the whole party were fixed upon her: those of Lady Belmour were expressive of rage and contempt: and those of her brother, of a mixture of pity and anger: unknown to her, they had been regarding her from the moment Lord Belmour had joined her.

Louisa started, and hurried out of the box without accepting the proffered assistance of his Lordship; while young Melford, who was compelled to assist his aunt, had the mortification of seeing him follow her, and lead her to the carriage, which was in waiting.

To the entreaties of Lord Belmour, that she would allow him to call on her the next day, Louisa gave a positive denial; and hurrying to the carriage, threw herself in, and wept without restraint.

CHAP. VII.

Praise her but for this her without-door form
(Which, on my faith, deserves high speech) and straight
The shrug, the hum, or ha; these petty brands,
That calumny doth use:—Oh! I am out,
That mercy does; for calumny will fear
Virtue itself: these shrugs, these hums, and has,
When you have said she's goodly, come between,
Ere you can say she's honest.

SHAKESPEAR.

By the time Mrs. Melford was seated composedly, Louisa had partly recovered from the violent agitation the sight of Walter Stanley had occasioned her.

Mrs. Melford immediately began to question her, as to who the gentleman was who had caused such a revolution in her spirits, and made her even inattentive to the forms of good manners. "I thought," said she, "your intention was to run away with him; you were in

such haste to get away from us: pray do tell us his name, for I am dying to know."

When Louisa informed her, and mentioned his affinity to the family of Sir Walter Stanley, the most intimate friends of her youth, Mrs. Melford was inexpressibly surprised.

"Lord Belmour!" said she, "son of the Earl of Delville; a family I have heard so often of in Cumberland; surely, Miss Fitzormond, you might have introduced his Lordship to me; we could have talked over so many things, as country folks always do; that I declare it would have been quite pleasant. I so seldom meet with a countryman; but perhaps he will call on you; you knew you were welcome to give him an invitation to my house: as he is such a great man, I should have been proud of the honour."

Louisa said she did not offer to intro-

duce his Lordship to them, as she imagined it might not be agreeable to either party; and as his Lordship was not a very intimate friend of hers, of course she did not give him an invitation to visit her. "But," continued she, "if I had, I believe you would have been disappointed in your expectations of holding any very interesting conversations with him relative to Cumberland, as I have heard he spends but very little time there."

This she said, in a great measure, to reconcile her to the disappointment of not having been introduced to Lord Belmour: but Mrs. Melford could not easily forget the fine opportunity she had lost of making an acquaintance with a lord; an opportunity that might not occur again; but if it ever did, she desired Louisa not to let it slip.

Young Melford was evidently piqued by her inattention to him, after the entrance of Lord Belmour into their box:

his narrow and suspicious mind was instantly employed to find out the reason of Louisa's agitation on the first appearance of his Lordship, as well as her subsequent abstraction, and renewed agitation when leaving the theatre: the party who had occasioned the latter, he had not observed.

It was some relief to his mind to hear that the person who had given him so much uneasiness was a married man; but that circumstance did not divest his mind of suspicion. In his intercourse with the sex, which had been confined to the meanest and most vicious, he had known instances of great duplicity under an exterior of innocence and candour: how then could he know but it might be the case at present? Thus he reasoned with himself, and did not cease till in imagination he had loaded Louisa with almost every vice.

Neither of the party arrived at home in so much harmony of mind as they

had left it: Mrs. Melford was reserved and pettish; her nephew sulky; and Louisa low-spirited.

The latter retired very soon to her chamber, where she had leisure to think over the occurrences of the day: those of the evening principally engaged her thoughts.

She had seen Walter Stanley and his wife, as she supposed Lady Adelina now was. Yet why should that give her so much pain? She had long known he could never be any thing to her; but she had always hoped to be remembered by him with that tender affection and respect which their early friendship warranted: this, she feared, was now done away: the look with which he had so steadfastly regarded her, seemed to reproach, and at the same time lament her as a creature on whom he could only bestow compassion.

"The jealousy of his sister," said she, "has infected him; it is evident he thinks me vile enough to encourage the attentions of a man who is married, and to his sister: can he think I am fallen so low? What infatuation to encourage such a thought: even if Lord Belmour were unmarried, and would offer me his hand, I would not accept of it: so free am I from having formed an attachment to him! But alas! he does not know that: he thinks, because I am degraded by misfortune to be a dependant on the bounty of strangers, that my soul is equally debased: but time will, I trust, convince him how much he now wrongs me in imputing to my heart so great a crime."

She condemned severely the imprudence of Lord Belmour, who must have been acquainted with the share he had had in alienating the affection of the Stanleys

from her, for leaving his party to join her: even allowing that he reprobated the mean jealousy of Lady Belmour, and was resolved not to miss an opportunity of paying his respects to her, who was so innocent of having giving offence, yet he ought to have avoided such marked and public attention. No opportunity was likely to be given her to vindicate herself; therefore she must still be under the stigma of having acted with duplicity, if not with a greater degree of vice.

It may appear extraordinary that Lady Stanley and her eldest daughter, who both condemned the suspicions of Lady Belmour before Louisa left Bath, should so suddenly have altered their opinion, and not only have joined Lady Belmour in suspecting her of encouraging the particular attentions of Lord Belmour, but even have treated her with a degree of severity greater than that lady, vindictive as she was, could be capable of doing at a

time when she was suffering under so dreadful an affliction as the death of Mr. Howard.

But Lady Stanley was not so much to blame as might at first appear: circumstances were communicated to her, after Louisa's departure, which staggered the good opinion she had always entertained of her. Miss Stanley was not so much the dupe of appearances as her mother; but she was compelled to write as she had done, and also to give her word most solemnly that she would hold no further communication with her.

The circumstances alluded to were the frequent private visits which Louisa made to the house of Mrs. Mason. Lady Belmour had placed spies on her conduct from the time of their return to Bath: but as Louisa had not visited her little friend till the evening before she left Bath to return to M——, Lady

Belmour did not hear of it till after her departure; then, to her utter confusion and dismay, she was told that Louisa had been seen to enter the house of Mrs. Mason, and that shortly after Lord Belmour was seen to follow: this confirmation of her ladyship's worst surmises was daggers to her soul; but she determined to know more, if it was to be known, and for this purpose, by bribes and great address, discovered that Louisa frequently had gone to the same place in a private manner, and had met his Lordship there: this information she obtained from the servant who had generally accompanied her.

The poor girl was quite unconscious of doing any thing that would occasion mischief by telling this when questioned artfully by Lady Belmour. Louisa had warned her in the most forcible manner against ever mentioning the circumstance of Miss Conway and the infant; but had

never said more to her on the subject, as she had not suspected any remarks would be made inimical to herself.

When those meetings were discovered to Lady Stanley, she was enraged at the duplicity of Louisa, in proportion to the confidence she had before placed in her apparent virtue. The vices of those whose conduct has always appeared unexceptionable, or of those whom, by certain situations in life, or a more strict education, the mind naturally expects to find undeviating in rectitude, create more horror than the lapse of a person who is not supposed to possess such a security from the allurements of pleasure.

This was the case with Lady Stanley: she had firmly believed Louisa to be quite free from the vanity which a young woman so handsome as she was generally possessed.

Coquetry, she had observed, was not to be imputed to her, as she was perfectly free from that; and as to faults less

venial, she could never for a moment have supposed her guilty of any: her surprise and anger were therefore greater at finding she had been so egregiously deceived.

This was increased by a circumstance from which no prudence could have secured her.

Louisa had travelled from Bath in a hack chaise, with an attendant on horse back, to whom she was to have given a letter to take back, to assure her friends of her safe arrival.

The distressing event that awaited her on her arrival prevented her doing this; and the servant, who happened to be a stranger at the manor-house, and a very careless fellow, neglecting to make any inquiries, set off totally unacquainted with the melancholy state in which he left his charge, and could give no further information, when questioned on the subject, but that he had seen the young

lady safe to her journey's end, but that she had neither sent back letter nor message.

To add to this untoward event, the man who had been sent with an express to fetch her, was met at an inn where he stopped, by the driver of the chaise which had conveyed her part of the way. Those two men being known to each other, entered into conversation, and the nature of the express being told, the post-boy, who knew Miss Fitzormond, informed him his journey was needless, as the lady had passed him on the road: the man therefore returned the way he came, and arrived a few hours after Louisa; and thus prevented Lady Stanley from receiving information of Mr. Howard's illness and danger.

When the death of Mr. Howard was known to the Stanley family, they were too much occupied with events that more nearly concerned themselves, to allow

them to do more than express their regret to each other for the loss of so excellent a man. Condoling with Louisa they now thought unnecessary, as they were convinced of her unworthiness.

Sir Walter did not give much credit to the tale told by his family; but as he was irritated against his son for not complying with his most anxious desire respecting Lady Adelina, he began to impute blame to Louisa, as the cause of Walter's disobedience; and seized this accusation with pleasure, that he might urge it as a plea with his son to discard her from his heart: if that was once done, Sir Walter had no doubt but that he would immediately offer his hand to Lady Adelina.

Thus did Sir Walter let his anxiety to promote one favourite scheme get the better of his justice, and the natunal generosity of his character, and countenance a report injurious to the fame of an in-

nocent girl, merely to advance his own interested views.

Fearful of coming to a rupture with the family of Lord Belmour at this critical time, he laid the most strict injunctions on his wife and daughters not to take any notice of the affair to his Lordship.

When Walter Stanley attended his father to London, the latter informed him that he had given his word of honour to pay in six months a sum of money to a large amount, which he had lost at play; that he depended on him to assist him with it, which he knew he could only do by marrying Lady Adelina Belmour. The gentleman to whom he had lost the money was aware of this circumstance; therefore it was necessary he should at least give some colour to the pretence, by appearing to pay attention to the lady, even if he was determined rather to see his father perish, than consent to save

him from ruin and dishonour, by agreeing to his proposal entirely. The rest of his creditors he had put off for the same time, and if then he was not enabled to discharge the most urgent of their demands, he declared it was his fixed determination to escape from anxiety and disgrace by self-destruction; but could he by any other means raise the money, he assured his son, he would not again press him to do what was so repugnant to his feelings.

Walter Stanley, shocked at this resolution of his father's, which he knew, from the impetuosity of his disposition, he was very likely to execute, reasoned with him on the folly, and cruelty to his family, of such an act, and entreated him to forego the idea of it; but Sir Walter's resolution was taken: he could never, he said, survive the ruin of his family: he had so far involved himself, that if he was not extricated by some lucky chance, or by

his son's assistance, a prison or death was the only alternative, and the latter he considered most preferable.

Hoping that some event might occur, to rescue his father from his embarrassments, Walter promised to gratify him by paying a visit to Delville Castle. But it was with this proviso, that he was not to be considered by him, or the lady, to go there in the character of a suitor; as he declared he could not bring himself to submit to do so with a heart solely devoted to another object.

Sir Walter was satisfied with having gained this point, from which he hoped results the most favourable to his wishes, as he concluded, when his son found nothing else could be done to relieve the distresses his father had brought on himself, that he would be induced, by the esteem a more intimate acquaintance with Lady Adelina must naturally create, to accede to his wishes with less reluctance.

But when, after delaying his visit till it was nearly the usual time of the Earl's family leaving the castle, he still continued as unwilling to accept the hand of Lady Adelina, which, it was evident to every one, only waited his solicitation, Sir Walter became impatient and peremptory. His creditors had again become clamourous, and he could no longer hide from his lady the state of his affairs. Alarmed lest she should be compelled to descend from the elevated station in society, which she had so long filled with infinite satisfaction to herself, Lady Stanley importuned her son to save her from misery, by consenting to marry a lady whose generosity would permit him to appropriate a part of her fortune to retrieve the honour of his family. Learning his objections arose from his affection for Louisa, she bitterly lamented having ever allowed her to associate with her family, and expressed her determination of

never again permitting her to enter it, as she had not only destroyed the peace of her daughter, but would now be the means of ruining her son.

Her ladyship represented to him the shameless conduct of Louisa while at Bath, and her ingratitude since she left it, in terms tending to excite his resentment against her. But as he knew the disposition of his sister, that she had always disliked Louisa for being her rival in beauty, and also his mother's partiality for Armida, he attached little credit to the report, considering it arose from unfounded jealousy on one side, and credulity on the other.

Louisa's virtue he firmly believed so exalted, that he considered it almost sacrilege to suspect her of any crime, much less one of so deep a dye.

But when Sir Walter's testimony corroborated that of his mother's, his faith in her virtue was staggered; he could

not suppose his father would assert a thing he did not implicitly believe, and he knew he was not a man whose credulity would lead him into error. The fiend of jealousy then took possession of his breast: he recollected several circumstances he had not before regarded, in which Louisa had shewn her partiality for Lord Belmour. She had given him the preference to drive her in his carriage, she had been agitated in his company; and, what confirmed his suspicions, she had avoided being alone with him, whom she had known from childhood, after Lord Belmour came to the hall, more than she ever had before done: till his suspicions were roused, he fondly believed those were marks of her attachment to himself; but now he reprobated his folly in supposing so; was convinced she had never beheld him with affection, and was totally indifferent to

the sufferings he endured on her account.

In this frame of mind, he promised Sir Walter solemnly he would make proposals to Lady Adelina; his happiness was gone, he said, if he could no longer dwell with pleasure on the perfections of her to whom he had given his heart, or hope that he was not indifferent to one whose love would have raised him superior to every evil or misfortune in life. As that was the case, he would no longer defer conferring happiness on those who had given him life: to them then it should be devoted.

Sir Walter had his permission to apply to the Earl of Delville for his consent, which he readily availed himself of, rejoiced at having at length succeeded in his design, though it was by means which he could not but abhor.

When the Earl's consent was ob-

tained, and Walter informed that Lady Adelina was prepared to receive him as her future husband, his soul sickened at the idea, and he justly condemned the jealousy which had made him so rashly yield to resentment. But it was too late to retreat; he had authorised his father to make proposals which he found himself unable to do; and should he now drive him to desperation, by refusing to ratify a contract which he had so long and ardently wished to see him enter into? Oh! no: honour and humanity alike forbid it.

But the anxiety with which he had struggled, from the time he left Stanley-Hall, was so much increased by this combination of painful circumstances, that his health yielded to it: and a nervous fever reduced him so low, that his life was for some time despaired of. The distress of Lady Adelina on his ac-

count gave her fond parents reason to fear that they should be deprived of her who formed their principal happiness; and nothing but the most melancholy apprehensions were entertained by both families.

Lady Stanley for a time forgot her darling pleasures in the more powerful anxieties of maternal love; and Sir Walter almost resolved to meet the worst that could befal him, by releasing his son from the engagements he had forced him to enter into.

The excellence of his constitution at length triumphed, and change of air being strongly recommended, he left Bath to pass some weeks with a particular friend who resided in a county near the metropolis, where he proposed joining his family when his health was renovated.

He had only been a few days in town when he saw Louisa at the play, and

had not yet prevailed on himself to renew those proposals Sir Walter had made for him. Lady Adelina had received him with every demonstration of the purest affection, for which he felt the utmost gratitude; but he still found reason for delay, and wished most ardently he could devise some plan to make her yield her pretensions to him, without wounding her feelings or shaking her delicacy. This he had flattered himself he should be able to do, and also, with the advice and assistance of the friend with whom he had lately been, and to whom he had imparted the anxiety that preyed on his mind, extricate his father from his most pressing difficulties. But the sight of Louisa this evening entirely altered his resolution, renewed his jealousy, and confirmed his belief of her criminality.

Lord Belmour had not accompanied his party to the theatre, but had pro-

mised to join them there. Agreeably to his promise, he came; and was proceeding to their box, when the sight of Louisa (who accidentally met his view) banished every idea but what was connected with herself, from his mind.

By the positive desire of Sir Walter, his Lady, who possessed great influence over the mind of her daughter, had prevailed on her not to communicate to her Lord what they had discovered relative to him and Louisa. With this desire Lady Belmour had complied, therefore Lord Belmour was not so culpable as Louisa had imagined him to be, as he really did not know the share he had had in depriving her of the affection of his wife's family.

As he had from the first seen the evident partiality that subsisted between her and Walter Stanley, and knew how anxious both Sir Walter and his own

family were that he should marry his sister, he imputed their coldness and disregard of her to that circumstance.

Lord Belmour's principles were too free, and his disposition too careless, to permit him to raise any objections to his sister bestowing her hand on a man whose affections were engaged to another; he knew such circumstances were not at all uncommon in high life, and would have considered himself as absurdly fastidious, if he had interposed to prevent it on that account.

It was not till the departure of Louisa, that Lord Belmour recollected for what purpose he had come to the theatre. He then went again to look for his party, but they had left it directly after Louisa.

His Lordship, therefore, after waiting to see the performance of a favourite dancer, retired with several gay young noblemen like himself, to a club-house in the vicinity of St. James's, where

he spent the remainder of the night, and those hours of the morning, (devoted by sober people to the refreshing influence of sleep) in the corroding but fascinating enjoyment of rattling a dice-box, and staking sums, that ought to make a reasonable being blush to own having employed on the turn of a die. Too fashionable a man to disturb the repose of his lady at so early an hour, he retired to his own apartment, and did not meet her till late the next day, when he had forgotten the events of the preceding evening, in the ruinous events of the night.

Walter Stanley, who had observed Louisa for some time, was mortified to see her in such apparent good spirits, and conversing so familiarly with the gentleman who sat next to her. For though circumstances had almost compelled him to resign the fond hope he had indulged of one day calling her his, he could not

endure the idea of another having that happiness, at least till he had placed an insurmountable bar between them himself. Neither could he patiently bear to see her appear indifferent about him.

He had seen Lord Belmour enter the box in which she was seated with a sensation of alarm; yet mixed with a confidence that their meeting would be only simply that of common acquaintance. How great then was his surprise and horror to discover the agitation of Louisa, to see the sort of confidential conversation in which they appeared to be immediately engaged, and to observe her total inattention both to her party and the performance after his Lordship joined her.

With a heart torn with contending emotions he continued to gaze on her: no doubt of her guilt remained on his mind; yet he could not view her with the detestation he had once thought he should, if assured of it: and he condemned himself for his

weakness. He thought of those days when she was so innocent and lovely; he beheld her now as beautiful as ever to a common observer, but the charm which had fascinated him was gone; she was transformed from a being pure, ingenuous and feeling, to a light coquette, careless of the pain she inflicted on the hearts of those who had loved her, and flirting indiscriminately with all whom her beauty would allure.

He was almost thankful to providence for having raised obstacles to prevent him from uniting his fate with hers, as no doubt, on emerging from the retirement in which she had been bred, she would have thrown off those endearing virtues, which had attached him to her, and commenced what she then was; no tie would have been strong enough to have secured that virtue, which a short acquaintance with the world had been able to destroy.

He determined from that moment to

tear her image from his heart, and, if possible, never again to think of her. He no longer wondered at the jealousy of his sister, but lamented she should have been so unfortunate as to marry a man who had so little regard to the solemn vow he had taken at the altar. But he would not augment her distress by letting her know he entertained suspicions so injurious to him. The same reason prevented him from coming to an explanation with Lord Belmour, which at first was his intention. If he had done so without violence, his lordship would have exculpated himself from the charge brought against him, and cleared the character of Louisa; as, to do him justice, though he was thoughtless, and in many instances cruel, yet he had not sunk so low in vice, as wantonly to destroy the fair fame of a virtuous woman.

But Walter Stanley, listening only to the suggestions of his resentment, would

not seek to discover if his suspicions were justly founded or not; appearances, added to what he had before heard, were against her: he therefore concluded she was guilty.

"Is this the woman!" cried he, as he paced his room in agony, "for whom I would have sacrificed friends and fortune! she who in my boyish days I so tenderly loved, and believed superior to the rest of her sex? Can this be the gentle being, for whom my days have been passed in misery, and my nights without repose? Too true it is the same; but, alas! how changed; how fallen from the height of virtue to the common level of the meanest and most degraded of women!"

In bitter remembrance of what she had been, and what he conceived her now to be, he passed the remainder of the night after he saw Louisa; and as soon as he could with propriety, he hast-

ened to Lady Adelina, and throwing himself at her feet, entreated her to accept his hand, and his assurance of everlasting esteem and gratitude.

His offer was accepted with joy, and a few days after they were indissolubly united, to the great satisfaction of Sir Walter and Lady Stanley, and also of the Earl and Countess of Delville, whose affection for their daughter made them centre their happiness in hers.

Lady Belmour, though little accustomed to subdue the violence of her temper, had command enough over herself in the present instance. She had found by experience that she rather lost ground in her husband's affections, than gained any by her complaints. He always treated her with the utmost good-humour, but invariably rallied her on the absurdity of so young and lovely a woman giving way to the destructive passion of jealousy. He would declare that it deformed her

features so much, that he did not know her when she was under its influence, and till she became the same beautiful Armida he had vowed always to love, he would avoid her sight.

And he generally kept his word: after any of those matrimonial discords, he would leave her to vent her ill-humour on those who were compelled to bear it, and perhaps not meet her, except in company, for several days; never having been accustomed to restraint from his parents, he was resolved not to submit to it from a wife.

Lady Belmour, finding this to be the case, determined to stifle her resentment, and devise some means to be revenged on Lousia, whom she considered the cause of all the torments she suffered; not once reflecting it was herself who was ingenious in creating them.

CHAP. VIII.

Nought is there under heav'n's wide hollowness
That moves more dear compassion of the mind,
Than beauty brought t'unworthy wretchedness
By envy's snares, or fortune's freaks unkind.
SPENSER.

MRS. MELFORD did not fail to communicate to her husband the conversation she had had with Louisa, relative to their proposed plan of marrying her to their nephew, and also the objections Louisa had made; objections, which, she said, she had no doubt but they should overcome, as young girls like her seldom know their own mind.

Mr. Melford expressed much dissatisfaction that the proposals made should have been objected to: he said the girl must be mad if she persisted in her refusal of such advantageous offers, and as she

was completely in his power, he should treat her as such, if she did not comply with their wishes, which were as much for her benefit as their own satisfaction.

Mrs. Melford undertook to win her to compliance, as she had great confidence in her own powers of eloquence and persuasion, and also great reliance on the obliging and gentle nature of Louisa, whom she had found always ready to give up any point to gratify the desire of another, even if it were disagreeable to herself.

But in an affair of so much importance, Louisa was immovably fixed in her own opinion: neither the eloquence, persuasions, entreaties, or threats of Mrs. Melford had power to move her: she was therefore compelled to give up the task she had engaged to perform "to abler hands," as she expressed it.

But neither the soft speeches of the all-accomplished Mr. Frank Melford,

or the more austere reproofs of his father, succeeded better. Louisa gave her reasons for declining the honour they intended her, in a firm and dispassionate manner. She was not, she said, to be allured by wealth, or terrified by threats, to do what her reason disapproved, and what her conscience condemned: that, though she had not been accustomed to depend on her own exertions for support, yet she had always considered it as an event that might occur: that since the loss of that respected friend, whom death had torn from her, she had prepared her mind to submit to it with fortitude and cheerfulness: this being the case, she requested she might no more be importuned on a subject to which she was so decidedly averse.

Young Melford, who had dwelt with malicious anger and offended pride on the occurrences of the evening, when they were met by Lord Belmour at the

theatre, ascribed her rejection of him to a passion she must entertain for his Lordship; no other motive could, in his opinion, make her so pertinaciously adhere to her resolution; and even that he thought extraordinary, when put in competition with himself and a splendid fortune. But he vowed, in the bitterness of insulted self-love, not to let them triumph with impunity.

Mr. Melford imagined her refusal of his son arose from some knowledge she had obtained of his villainy with regard to the will of Mr. Howard. He thought she only waited for an opportunity to make him deliver up what he had so fraudulently obtained, when she would expose him to the world, and triumph in having defeated his well-laid plan.

Fearful of this, he strongly opposed her leaving his house, and determined in his own mind to confine her in some place where it would be impossible for

her to make her claims known, unless she complied with his wishes. The half-formed project in his mind was sooner completed than he had expected, by the assistance of persons as wickedly disposed as himself.

It may be recollected that a Miss Freeman was introduced to Louisa as the friend and companion of Lady Adelina Belmour, when she first came to Stanley Hall; and also, that Louisa had incurred that lady's dislike.

This Miss Freeman was a slight acquaintance of Mr. Frank Melford: he had frequently met her at the house of a friend, and had never paid her any very particular attention; but he remembered she resided in the family of the Earl of Delville; and from the ill-natured observations he recollected to have heard her once make respecting Louisa, he thought she might aid him in the design

he had formed to be revenged on her for the affront he had received.

For this purpose, he called on the lady, who had been a school-fellow of Miss Freeman's, and artfully introduced the name of her friend: he soon obtained all the information he desired, which was, that Miss Freeman was in town with Lady Adelina Stanley, and that she frequently visited her old school-fellow. Before young Melford took leave of Mrs. Randal, (the name of the lady,) he had insinuated himself so far into her good opinion, that she promised to send an invitation to Miss Freeman to spend the next day with her, and gave him one to meet her.

The manners and disposition of Frank Melford were exactly calculated to please the lady with whom he was now desirous of forming an intimacy. The attention he paid her when they met, (as con-

certed between Mrs. Randal and himself,) were so agreeable to her, that she confessed to her friend she thought him infinitely pleasing, and wondered she had never before discovered his merit; but the fact was, the gentleman had thought her far beneath his attention when he had seen her before; and, but to make her a tool for his vile purposes, he had not now condescended to let her know his infinite perfections; and happy would it have been for her to have remained still in ignorance of them and him.

Mrs. Randal, who knew few of the ill qualities of her friend or of Melford, thought she could do nothing more likely to promote the interest of the former, than to encourage their frequent meetings: she believed Miss Freeman a sensible, clever girl, and she knew Melford expected a good fortune: she therefore hoped to be the means of her friend forming a respectable alliance, which she had

often expressed a wish to see her do, as she had no relatives or friends who were interested in her welfare, (beside the Earl of Delville's family,) except herself; and of the precariousness of dependance she was well aware.

By this means, Frank Melford had frequent opportunities of seeing and conversing with Miss Freeman. The flattery with which he assailed her, though gross in the extreme, was too palatable to be treated with the contempt it merited, more particularly by one to whom flattery (so pleasing to almost every created being) was a novelty; at least from a person who was her superior in point of riches; for few indeed are there, who will flatter the poor or the ill-favoured, and Miss Freeman was both.

The purpose for which this acquaintance was formed was not long neglected by young Melford: he had no sooner mentioned Louisa's name, than he found

he could not have fixed on any person more willing to do her an injury. Miss Freeman almost anticipated his suspicions respecting Lord Belmour's attachment to Louisa, and certainly confirmed them. Well satisfied that she had now a subject on which she could indulge the rancour of her heart, she resolved without delay to make Lady Belmour acquainted with the knowledge she had gained, and of Miss Fitzormond's baseness. This was exactly what young Melford aimed at: he wished to expose Louisa to the fury of a jealous woman; he knew his revenge might be disappointed by the prudence of the friends of Lady Belmour, who would rather wish to keep her ignorant of the infidelity of her Lord, than acquaint her with it.

He therefore prevailed on Miss Freeman to acquaint Lady Belmour at once with the circumstance, and also to in

sinuate to her Ladyship that she might have the satisfaction of punishing her rival, if she would concur in a plan he had formed for that purpose.

He possessed too much cunning to let her know he had been rejected by Louisa, but said his motive for disliking her arose partly from the knowledge he had obtained of the wickedness of her heart, and partly from the injury he was likely to sustain in his fortune, by the influence she had obtained over the affections of his aunt; as he made no doubt she had art enough to persuade her, to whom she could claim some degree of relationship, to leave her the whole of her fortune: which fortune, he said, he had been always led to believe should be his.

There were few things Miss Freeman could refuse to the entreaties of her dear Melford. She therefore agreed to be guided by his direction in every thing

that would tend to injure one who had never willingly offended her, but who possessed too much beauty and candour not to be an object of dislike to her who possessed neither. Louisa also had once treated her with merited contempt; she then vowed within her own mind that she would be revenged; and hers was not a heart to forgive either real or supposed injuries.

As there was a constant intercourse between the families of Lord Belmour and his sister, Miss Freeman, who had rendered herself very agreeable to Lady Belmour, was not long without an opportunity of putting her intention in force. She took occasion one morning, when left alone with Lady Belmour, to speak of her first visit to Stanley Hall, and of her acquaintance with Miss Fitzormond; a young lady who, she was sorry to say, had disgraced the excellent man by whom she had been brought up,

and who had bestowed an education on her, which ought to have been the means of preserving her from the vices into which she had fallen. But for her part, she had never been deceived, as she had always seen she was very artful, and that her apparent simplicity concealed a depraved heart.

Lady Belmour understood, by the significant looks of the person who now addressed her, that she only wanted a little encouragement to be more explicit; and though her pride revolted at the idea of confessing or hearing from an inferior that she had a rival, yet eager curiosity, and a desire for revenge, got the better of that feeling, and she not only condescended to give that encouragement, but communicated her own suspicion on the subject, and declared the ardent desire she had to punish the presumption of the insolent girl, who had dared to make her an object of derision,

by letting the world know she was neglected and abused for her—a creature brought up on charity by a country parson.

Miss Freeman soon saw that the way to irritate her Ladyship as much as possible, and to keep up her vexation, was to tell her the intrigues of her Lord and Miss Fitzormond were no secret; that even the servants knew and talked of it. This to Lady Belmour was worse even than the injury done her; she could have borne to have suffered in secret; but to be pitied, as she was informed she was by persons she looked on with disdain, as only born to be her slaves, and to view her with distant respect, was too humiliating.

"Supply me, my dear Freeman," said she, "with the means to be revenged, and I shall think no reward too great that is in my power to bestow."

This, her Ladyship was informed,

should be done: she was also told of the artful conduct of Louisa, in alienating the affections of Mrs. Melford from her nephew, and of his willingness to forward any plan which her Ladyship would condescend to form.

"Most willingly would I do it if I could," cried Lady Belmour eagerly, "but unfortunately there are no means in this country short of death; and that, much as I hate the girl, I cannot endure to think of. Oh! that we had here, as in some countries, convents or prisons, in which we could shut up those that are obnoxious to us without being called to account for it. But I rave in vain: tell your friend I will sanction whatever plan he adopts; but that I cannot fix on any myself."

Thus authorised, Miss Freeman communicated her Ladyship's sentiments to young Melford when they next met.

In the mean time, no inducement had

been wanting to make Louisa alter her determination; but she was still inexorable. The elder Mr. Melford told her she was bound to yield obedience to his will, as he, in right of his wife, could prove he had authority over her; but she treated all his representations alike with disdain. From the anxiety he betrayed that she should comply with his request, she began to fancy he had some motive unavowed. The idea that he had secreted the will of Mr. Howard again recurred to her, and determined her more firmly to resist the assumed authority he pretended to have over her.

Louisa found, to her utter dismay, that she was quite a prisoner, as, except the hours devoted to repose by the family, she was never left alone: she resolved then to take advantage of that time, and write a letter explanatory of her situation to Lady Delville, hoping that when that lady knew how she was situated, she

would condescend to befriend her, either with her advice or assistance.

She accordingly wrote a circumstantial letter to the Countess, in which she detailed every particular event which had taken place relative to herself since the day she had taken leave of her Ladyship at Stanley Hall: she mentioned the suspicions she entertained respecting Mr. Melford, and her reasons for suspecting him, which were chiefly founded on the ill opinion Mr. Howard had given her of him: she also slightly noticed having innocently incurred the displeasure and lost the friendship of the whole of Sir Walter Stanley's family, and concluded with hoping she should be able to clear her character from every imputation of blame, if her Ladyship would admit her to her presence, and suffer her to know the nature of her fault.

This letter she entrusted to a female servant, to forward to Lady Delville;

but Mr. Melford detected the girl with it in her hand, and with a trifling present bribed her to say she had put it in the post, instead of having delivered it up to him.

As this letter confirmed his suspicions as to the opinion Louisa had of him, it the more irritated him against her, and determined him to prevent her endeavouring to do herself that justice she seemed diposed to attempt.

The late illness of Louisa, occasioned by the shock she had received on so suddenly learning the death of Mr. Howard, together with the neglect of her former friends, had thrown a degree of melancholy abstraction on her mind, which frequently made her appear indifferent to the common events of life; and it was only when aroused to exertion by the importunities of Mr. Melford respecting his son, that she tried to shake off this apathy. Mrs. Melford had observed to

her husband, that Louisa had been more subject to those fits of absence, since they had talked of uniting her to Frank, and the reason of this she thought must arise from her having conceived an affection for some other person, which would, she feared, entirely disappoint their expectation of seeing her yield to their plan. Indeed she said she began to feel a repugnance to forcing the inclination of her niece, much as she wished for the accomplishment of their desire respecting her.

Mr. Melford, more alarmed at his wife's appearance of relaxing in the determination she had made, of only giving Louisa her fortune in case she married Frank, than even at her refusal of him, resolved to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion, by terrifying her into compliance. The reason his wife had urged as a motive for their desisting, he began to think would be a good subject to take

advantage of: he therefore took frequent occasion to mention the melancholy that preyed on Louisa's mind, with an appearance of concern, and even went so far as to say her intellects were, he firmly believed, seriously affected.

Mrs. Melford was not of his opinion that they really were so now, but she declared that she should not be surprised if it was the case in time, as it was enough to turn any lady's brain to be always moping and crying as Louisa was.

The secret design of Mr. Melford was imparted to his son, who gladly caught at the idea, as being, in his opinion, well calculated to ensure success. But as they found they could not easily obtain the concurrence of Mrs. Melford, they thought it better to keep her in ignorance of their intention, and lead her to suppose that the removal of

Louisa, which they meditated, was occasioned by a very different cause.

As a person likely to assist the scheme they had in agitation, young Melford mentioned to his father Miss Freeman, who was accordingly introduced to him, and made acquainted with their plan, and such parts of the intercepted letter as he thought necessary. This, she declared, would be the means of greatly assisting them in the execution of their design, which, she said, she had no doubt would be attended with the success Mr. Melford wished; and which, she insinuated, was perfectly harmless, and quite natural in him to use every means in his power to promote; but though she said this, she was determined to prevent the success of his plan, and only endeavour to gratify herself by feeding her revenge, and promoting her more immediate interest.

Miss Freeman had now a new cause for disliking Louisa: she found it was the intention of Mr. Melford to marry her to Frank; and that was an honour she had aspired to herself: but as young Melford assured her he did not mean to conform to the wishes of his father, she was partly consoled, and comforted herself by thinking, if she got Louisa in her power, she should have no difficulty in frustrating the designs of Mr. Melford, whom she was disposed to hate as cordially as she did Louisa.

The circumstance she alluded to in the letter of Louisa to the Countess of Delville, as likely to facilitate their design, was her request to be favoured with an interview.

"As Miss Fitzormond," said this malicious woman, "is not acquainted with the hand-writing of the Countess, it will be very easy for me to write her a note as from Lady Delville, and take it

myself; at the same time letting her understand the Countess wishes to see her. With this request she will of course readily comply; when I can conduct her to any place you think proper; and no one except ourselves will know any thing of the business."

This plan was approved of by both father and son, and a day appointed for the execution of it.

Louisa, who had impatiently waited for an answer to her letter, and listened with a palpitating heart to every knock at the door, from the time she imagined it might have reached the Countess, was at length gratified by receiving a very kind note by the hands of Miss Freeman, who appeared rejoiced to see her, and confirmed what the note had mentioned, that the Countess wished Louisa to accompany her to a villa she was now at, a short distance from town.

With a heart bounding with delight

at the thoughts of escaping from the persecution of the Melfords, and of being permitted to clear herself from the aspersions cast on her character, and probably being reconciled to her dear and early friends, Louisa scarcely waited to take leave of them, but hurried to the hackney coach which was in waiting, and, followed by Miss Freeman, was driven off, while the latter was secretly exulting in the success of her scheme.

Louisa had been prejudiced against Miss Freeman, from the time she considered she had betrayed the confidence of Lady Adelina; but she now retracted her ill opinion, and blamed herself for thinking unkindly of a person who evidently rejoiced to do her a service; little suspecting that her appearance of satisfaction arose from a motive so diametrically opposite.

During their ride, Louisa inquired

affectionately after the family of the Earl and that of Sir Walter Stanley. But she found she could not trust herself to inquire when Lady Adelina was married, or any thing relating to her and Walter Stanley, whom she secretly hoped she should not see, till she could think of him with less emotion than she did at present.

When the coach stopped, Louisa, who had not inquired where the house belonging to the Countess was situated, was much surprised to see it bore very little the appearance of a nobleman's villa, being a large, old-fashioned, though respectable looking building, with a high walled court before it, and not at all in a pleasant situation.

But she had not much time for conjecture, as the gate was immediately opened by a man bearing the appearance of a servant out of livery; who conduct-

ed them into the house with an air of secrecy which was not pleasing to Louisa, though she saw Miss Freeman appeared perfectly at her ease.

END OF VOL. II.

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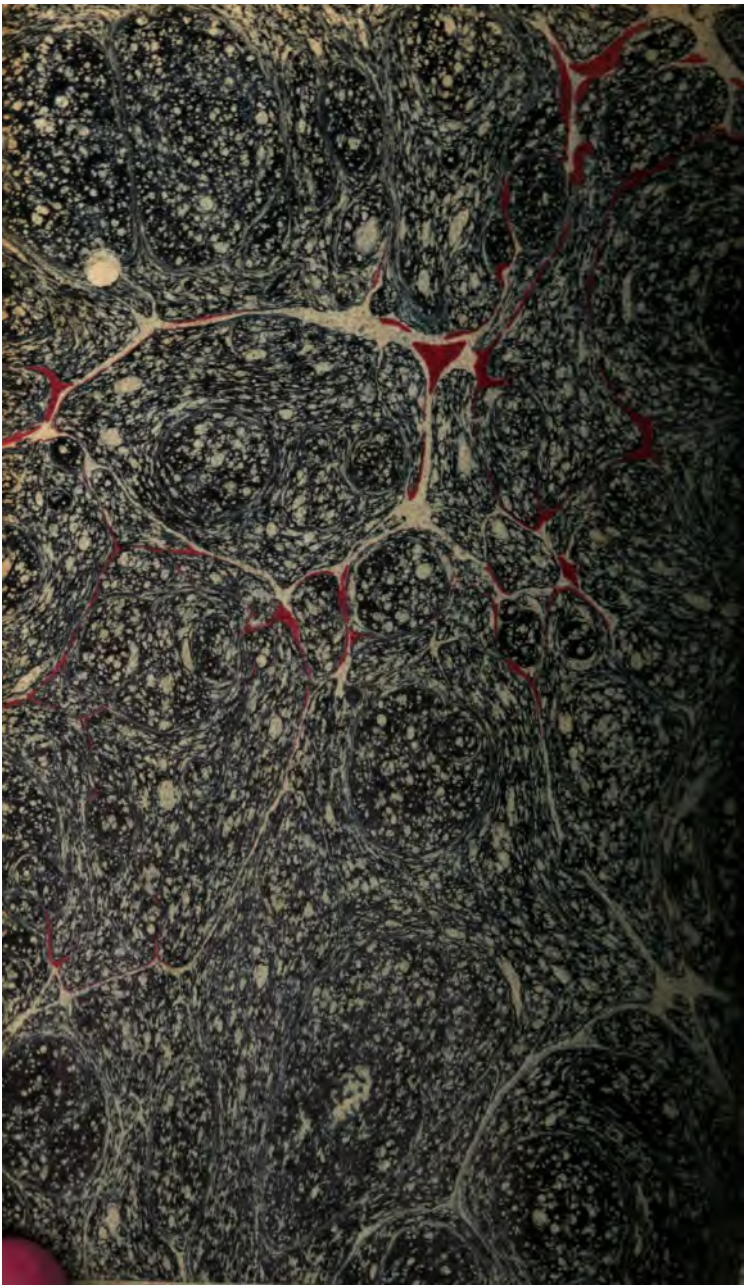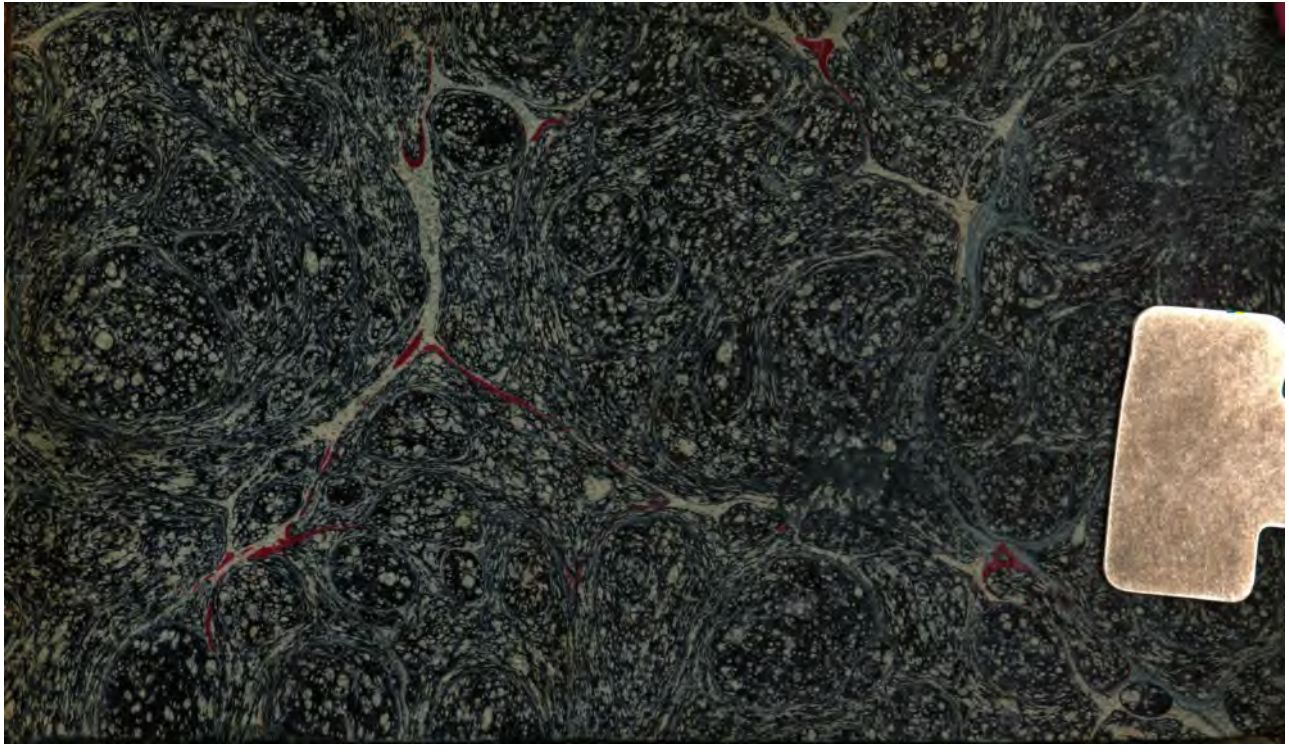
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